





# ROWLAND'S | ROWLAND'S

**M**

is the  
the ha  
dients  
fair-h  
and bi  
10/6, a

**R  
K**

is the  
plexio  
and it  
skin;  
ness,  
the eff  
it soft

**ZOI**

With num

**HIS MA**

**THE LA**

Sequel

**RUSH**

Curée)

**GEO.**

By J

ROBERT W. WOODRUFF  
LIBRARY



EMORY UNIVERSITY  
*Special Collections & Archives*

**D**

gritty  
bel; it  
es the  
ig fra  
only

**S**

tints,  
from  
box.  
LAND'S  
avoid

**ELS.**

rations, 5s.

and Man.

ille).

NANA.

**RES.**

ILLE,

## GEO. REES' SPORTING PICTURES.

HUNTING, RACING, COACHING, &c., &c. In Sets of 6 for 25s., all  
Coloured by Hand.

## GEO. REES' ENGRAVINGS.

By SIR J. MILLAIS, SIR F. LEIGHTON, ALMA TADEMA, BRITON  
RIVIERE, &c. From 21s. each.

## GEO. REES' ETCHINGS.

By WALTNER, CARL HEFFNER, F. DICKSEE, F. SLOCOME,  
P. RAJON, &c. From 21s. each.

A LARGE ASSORTMENT ALWAYS ON VIEW AND FOR SELECTION.

115, STRAND, corner of SAVOY ST.; & 41-3. RUSSELL ST., COVENT GARDEN

VIZETELLY'S SIXPENNY SERIES OF AMUSING BOOKS.

---

*In picture cover, with many Engravings, price 6d.*

**MATRIMONY BY ADVERTISEMENT;**

AND OTHER ADVENTURES OF A JOURNALIST.

By CHARLES G. PAYNE.

Contains the Author's experiences in a Madhouse as an "Amateur Maniac," and on a hansom as an "Amateur Cabby," as well as the details of a pretended search for a wife through the agency of the Matrimonial Journals, and other amusing articles.

---

*Uniform with the above, and by the same Author.*

**VOTE FOR POTTLEBECK!**

THE STORY OF A POLITICIAN IN LOVE.

*Illustrated with a Frontispiece and numerous other Engravings.*

**CECILE'S FORTUNE.**

By F. DU BOISGOBEY.

---

**THE THREE-CORNERED HAT.**

By P. A. DE ALARCON.

---

**THE GREAT HOGGARTY DIAMOND.**

By W. M. THACKERAY.

---

**THE STEEL NECKLACE.**

By F. DU BOISGOBEY.

---

**THE BLACK CROSS MYSTERY.**

By HENRIETTE CORKRAN.

---

**CAPTAIN SPITFIRE, AND THE UNLUCKY  
TREASURE.**

By P. A. DE ALARCON.

---

**YOUNG WIDOWS.**

By E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

*Profusely Illustrated.*

---

**A SHABBY GENTEEL STORY.**

By W. M. THACKERAY.



*Crown 8vo, 460 pages, in characteristic binding, price 6s.*

## THE CELEBRATED RUSSIAN REALISTIC NOVEL, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.

BY FEDOR DOSTOIEFFSKY. AUTHOR OF "BURIED ALIVE."

Pronounced by the "Athenæum" to be "the most moving of all modern novels."

The *Athenæum* further says:—"The reader knows the personages—strange, grotesque, terrible personages they are—more intimately than if he had been years with them in the flesh. He is constrained to live their lives, to suffer their tortures, to scheme and resist with them, exult with them, weep and laugh and despair with them; he breathes the very breath of their nostrils, and with the madness that comes upon them he is afflicted even as they. This sounds extravagant praise, no doubt; but only to those who have not read the volume. To those who have, we are sure that it will appear rather under the mark than otherwise."

---

A BOOK FOR THE PRESENT CRISIS.

*In crown 8vo, price 1s.*

## IRISH HISTORY FOR ENGLISH READERS.

BY WILLIAM STEPHENSON GREGG.

"The history is one that every Englishman *ought* to read. As an outline to be filled up by wider reading it is an admirable little book."—*Literary World*.

---

*In crown 8vo, with folding frontispiece, limp cover, price 2s. 6d.*

## MY FIRST CRIME.

BY G. MACÉ, FORMER "CHEF DE LA SÛRETÉ" OF THE PARIS POLICE.

"An account by a real Lecoq of a real crime is a novelty among the mass of criminal novels with which the world has been favoured since the death of the great originator Gaboriau. It is to M. Macé, who has had to deal with real *juges d'instruction*, real *agents de la sûreté*, and real murderers, that we are indebted for this really interesting addition to a species of literature which has of late begun to pall."—*Saturday Review*.

---

## THE BOULEVARD NOVELS.

Pictures of Paris Morals and Manners.

*In small 8vo, attractively bound, price 2s. 6d. each.*

NANA'S DAUGHTER. BY A. SIRVEN AND H. LEVERDIER.

THE YOUNG GUARD. BY VAST-RICOUARD.

THE WOMAN OF FIRE. BY ADOLPHE BELOT.

ODETTE'S MARRIAGE. BY ALPHONSE DELPIT.

BEAUTIFUL JULIE AND THE VIRGIN WIDOW. By  
A. MATTHEY.

## BERTHA'S SECRET.

# THE GABORIAU & DU BOISGOBEY SENSATIONAL NOVELS,

UNIFORM WITH THE PRESENT VOLUME.

---

THE STANDARD says:—"The romances of Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey picture the marvellous Lecoq and other wonders of shrewdness, who piece together the elaborate details of the most complicated crimes, as Professor Owen, with the smallest bone as a foundation, could re-construct the most extraordinary animals."

---

*The following Volumes are already Published:—*

IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE.  
THE LEROUGE CASE.  
LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE. 2 Vols.  
THE GILDED CLIQUE.  
OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY.  
THE SLAVES OF PARIS. 2 Vols.  
DOSSIER, No. 113.  
THE MYSTERY OF ORCIVAL.  
THE COUNT'S MILLIONS. 2 Vols.  
THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES.  
THE OLD AGE OF LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE. 2 Vols.  
INTRIGUES OF A POISONER.  
THE CATASTROPHE. 2 Vols.  
THE SEVERED HAND.  
IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.  
THE DAY OF RECKONING. 2 Vols.  
BERTHA'S SECRET.  
WHO DIED LAST?  
THE CRIME OF THE OPERA HOUSE. 2 Vols.  
THE MATAPAN AFFAIR.

*To be followed by:*

THE THUMB STROKE.  
A FIGHT FOR A FORTUNE.  
THE GOLDEN PIG. 2 Vols.

&c. &c. &c.

*DU BOISGOBEY'S SENSATIONAL NOVELS.*

v

# BERTHA'S SECRET.

BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

---

TWELFTH THOUSAND.

---

LONDON:  
*VIZETELLY & Co., 42 CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.*  
1886.

GLASGOW:  
DUNN AND WRIGHT,  
PRINTERS.

**6D.**      **New Vols. of Vizetelly's**      **6D.**  
                 **Amusing Books.**

*On Sale at all Booksellers and Railway Bookstalls.*

**CECILE'S FORTUNE.**

By F. DU BOISGOBEY.

**THREE-CORNERED HAT.**

By P. A. DE ALARCON.

**THE BLACK CROSS MYSTERY.**

By H. CORKRAN.

**THE STEEL NECKLACE.**

By F. DU BOISGOBEY.

**THE GREAT HOGGARTY DIAMOND.**

By W. M. THACKERAY.

**YOUNG WIDOWS (Illustrated).**

By E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

**CAPTAIN SPITFIRE & THE UNLUCKY  
TREASURE.**

By P. A. DE ALARCON.

**THE DETECTIVE'S EYE.**

By F. DU BOISGOBEY.

trip to Monaco, and on arriving there he determined to engage in a great contest with the bank—a contest which might cost him dear or make him

At all Booksellers and Bookstalls, ONE SHILLING.

---

# **IRISH HISTORY FOR ENGLISH READERS.**

By WM. STEPHENSON GREGG.

**'A History that every Englishman ought  
to read.'**—*Literary World.*

---

5th Thousand. Price ONE SHILLING.

# **SAPPHO.**

**PARIS MORALS AND MANNERS.**

By ALPHONSE DAUDET.

Illustrated with 8 Page Engravings.

*the ONLY UNABRIDGED CHEAP EDITION of Daudet's  
Powerful Love Story, containing fully Fifty  
Pages more than any other.*

Be particular to ask for VIZETELLY & CO.'S Edition.

# BERTHA'S SECRET.

---

## I.

ALTHOUGH you may have visited Monaco, you certainly have never been a resident there. Few people make this dangerous principality their permanent abode, unless they are the inventors of some new but infallible method of winning at the *roulette* or *trente-et-quarante* table; and, as for the unsophisticated fellows who go there to try their fortunes, only those who blow their brains out fail to depart. Most of the survivors consider themselves fortunate if they have enough money left them to pay for a third-class ticket home, and but few return richer than when they started. Still, this was the case with Paul de Lizy, as he wended his way homewards last winter. He was travelling leisurely, after the fashion of a man who likes comfort, and who has nothing to do. He had stopped for one day at Nice, for one at Marseilles, and for another at Lyons, where he took the seven P.M. train, timed to reach Paris at a quarter-past five on the following morning. He had won a large sum of money at Monte-Carlo, and he had luckily found an unoccupied first-class compartment in which he hoped to remain free from intrusion during his return journey.

Paul de Lizy was a bachelor, some thirty-five years of age, good-looking, extremely intelligent, a favourite in the best society, and the possessor of an income of some forty thousand francs, which he had enjoyed ever since attaining his majority, having lost both his father and mother while he was still at college. But although he thoroughly enjoyed life, and refused himself nothing in the way of pleasure, he had not abstained from doing his duty, and that right bravely, during the war of 1870. A volunteer in a cavalry regiment, he had speedily won his epaulettes by two brilliant acts of valour; and after a trying campaign in the east, with Bourbaki's army, he had only himself to blame if he had not risen above the rank of lieutenant. But he had little taste for garrison life, and, after peace was declared, he returned to his old habits of idleness. For the last six months, however, he had been thrown a good deal into the society of a young widow, a distant connection of his family, who inspired him with an entirely new sentiment. She was very charming, and, what is more, she was for a widow a paragon of virtue; moreover, she accepted his attentions very graciously. It would certainly be a grave step to marry her, and yet Paul often wondered if it would not be as well for him to take the chance.

Perhaps he would not have hesitated so long if Madame Bertha de Marcenac had not been twice as rich as himself; but he could not bear the thought of being suspected of mercenary motives.

Whilst still in this uncertain frame of mind, Paul de Lizy decided on a trip to Monaco, and on arriving there he determined to engage in a great contest with the bank—a contest which might cost him dear or make him



a very wealthy man, for he said to himself : " If I win an enormous sum, I shall be so rich that Bertha won't make an unequal marriage if she marries me ; while if I'm ruined, which is more than probable, I shall be much too poor for her, and then I must try to forget her." Contrary to his expectations, however, he achieved a victory, and when he left Monaco laden with his spoils, there was a roll of eighty notes of one thousand francs each in his courier bag, to say nothing of a bill for three hundred thousand francs, payable at sight, upon Messrs. Rothschild Brothers in Paris.

Few men, if they had been in his place, would have travelled alone at night, but Paul de Lizy was afraid of nothing ; and, besides, he carried a loaded revolver in his pocket. Towards eleven o'clock he fell into a sound sleep, from which he did not awake until after four o'clock in the morning, when he was aroused by that peculiar chilliness which always heralds the approach of dawn. Rubbing his eyes, and yawning, he glanced out of the window of the carriage. The train had stopped at some station—probably for a supply of water or fuel, for no passengers were visible on the platform. There were only two or three porters moving about with lanterns. Paul drew out his watch and said to himself : " We must be at Fontainebleau or at Melun. It will be at least another hour before we reach Paris. How glad I shall be to get into a comfortable bed once more ! I hope that fool of an Antoine received my telegram, and that he will meet me at the station. I shall let him attend to the baggage, and go straight home to bed. This evening, at five o'clock, I will call upon Madame de Marcenac, for I am curious to know how she will receive the news of my triumph."

The shrill shriek of the locomotive rent the silence of the night, and then the train again moved on. Paul ensconced himself in his corner, lighted a cigarette, and began to smoke, when suddenly the door of the compartment was cautiously, but not noiselessly, opened.

Paul turned his head, and upon the footboard, he saw a man who was holding the door with one hand and clinging to the brass rail with the other. Believing that this stranger had some evil design, M. de Lizy immediately placed himself on the defensive. Without leaving his seat, he drew from his pocket an excellent six-chambered revolver, cocked it, and waited for the intruder with his left hand on the courier bag, which contained his roll of bank-notes and his bill of exchange. The man who had been standing upon the foot-board now darted into the compartment, quickly shutting the door behind him. He lowered the window, looked out, closed it, and then sunk upon the cushioned seat.

" It is evident that he has not seen me," thought Paul de Lizy, leaning back in his corner at the other end of the compartment.

The intruder did, indeed, seem to fancy that he was alone, for he wiped the perspiration from his forehead and panted loudly for breath, as if he were quite exhausted by running. The compartment was but very dimly lighted, and Paul could not distinguish the features of the intruder, but he could see that he wore a tall hat and a black frock-coat.

When the stranger had recovered his breath, he twisted the handkerchief with which he had wiped his face around his right hand, and rose with the evident intention of seating himself at the other end of the compartment. Paul also rose, and the result was that the two passengers met, face to face, but a short distance from the carriage lamp. The new-comer uttered a cry of surprise, and quickly recoiled on seeing the revolver, which was levelled at him.

" Don't venture farther, or I'll blow your brains out !" cried Paul.

"Why, sir, I have not the slightest desire to do so," replied the stranger hurriedly. "I did not know that you were here, and I simply wished to change my seat."

"Return to the one you formerly occupied, and stay there. I have the means of defending myself and my money."

"You must take me for a thief!"

"And what else could I take you for, I would like to know? Honest men are not in the habit of stealing into a railway-carriage after the train has left the station. Why did you not get in when the train stopped?"

"Because, although the Lyons express leaves passengers at Melun, it does not take fresh ones there. The ticket-office and gate were closed."

"Then you might have waited for the next train."

"I am very desirous to reach Paris as soon as possible."

"Were you in such haste that you preferred shirking the payment of your fare and running the risk of breaking your neck, to waiting for an hour or two?"

"It is true that I risked my life, but I entreat you to believe that it was not for the purpose of defrauding the railway company. Do you think that I look like a tramp?"

"You certainly look as if you had been in some scrape. Your clothes are torn, your shoes are covered with mud, and your hand seems hurt."

"That is true, and you might also add that I have lost my overcoat. So I have committed a crime. There are cases when an honourable man cannot do otherwise than fly like a thief. A man ought not to shrink from anything, when a woman's reputation is at stake."

Paul was not prepared for this reply, and before making a rejoinder he proceeded to examine the stranger more attentively. His travelling companion was a tall, young, and well-built man. A bushy black beard covered the lower part of his face, and his eyes were concealed by coloured glasses; but his complexion was fair, his bearing elegant, his voice musical, and his language grammatical. Everything seemed to indicate that his explanation of the escapade was the true one.

"Do you think," he continued, smiling, "that this hand has broken open a safe or murdered any one?" The hand he held out as he spoke was the left one, a long and slender hand, with tapering fingers and almond-shaped nails. "Ah! sir, I am quite sure that we belong to the same class of society," he resumed. "Indeed, I am under the impression that your face is not unknown to me, and you would perhaps recognise mine, if I had not put on a false beard and these blue spectacles for the occasion."

"You admit that?" exclaimed Paul.

"Certainly; and you can surely guess my reason for disguising myself; so I hope you will allow me to retain my disguise, and excuse me from revealing my name, which I should be only too happy to give you under other circumstances—if only for the sake of re-assuring you."

Paul de Lizy reddened slightly, and replaced his revolver in his pocket. "Well, upon my word," he said, gaily, "I must confess that you startled, even frightened me. And can you wonder at it? The papers constantly report assassinations in railway-trains, and you must admit that your mode of entering was not very re-assuring. But I see now that I was needlessly alarmed. It seems absurd for us to be standing here glaring at each other; so suppose we sit down and have a chat?"

"Nothing would suit me better," replied the stranger, resuming his seat, "and I bless the lucky chance that brought me to this compartment.

If I had entered any other, I should no doubt have encountered some fool who would have shouted: 'Thief, thief!' and have denounced me, although such a scandal would have caused the greatest conceivable misery."

"I can faithfully promise you to be silent," said Paul, "and I shall not try to ferret out your secret; but I should very much like to know how you got into the train without being seen by any one."

"It was a very simple affair. Some five hundred feet from the station, I climbed over the fence. I then waited for the Lyons train. I knew it would arrive at twenty minutes past four, and it passed so near me that for a moment the sensation was anything but pleasant. As soon as it stopped to leave some passengers, I crawled along on my hands and knees to the last carriage, and I climbed upon the footboard and laid myself down flat upon it. After the train started, I rose up and looked through the windows, and thought this compartment was empty. I was mistaken, but I don't regret my mistake, as you understand the situation——"

"Not remarkably well, although I see that you have been compelled to fly in hot haste, and I imagine that you were probably surprised by a jealous husband; but it seems to me that you might have found some other means of reaching Paris."

"How? I am not familiar with the country; besides, I did not feel equal to a journey of fifteen or sixteen miles on foot. Moreover, I was afraid of being pursued, and I was sure that the fact would be reported if I were seen either in Melun or at the station. The enraged man with whom I have to deal will shrink from nothing. Heaven only knows what will be the result of the scene between him and his poor wife! Will she succeed in clearing herself and calming his fury? I doubt it, though he may, perhaps, resort to dissimulation to attain his object, which is to obtain a divorce, and perhaps subject her to several months' imprisonment. The man is a born detective. He will begin an investigation, and as he is very powerful by reason of his position in the official world, he may set numerous spies upon my track, spies who will try to ascertain whether I left Paris last evening, and at what hour I returned there this morning. But they will fail, for I have taken my precautions. My valet has orders to say that I have been ill in bed for a couple of days, and as it will still be dark when I reach home, my porter will not see me enter the house. If I had waited at Melun for the next train, my false beard and blue glasses would have attracted attention. In Paris, in the midst of a crowd, they are an effectual disguise, but at a small railway station, where there are but few people, deception is impossible. Tell me now, sir, if I did not act wisely, after all, in taking your compartment by storm?"

"I admit that you could hardly have done otherwise; but there is one thing that you have forgotten. What will you do when you are asked to give up your ticket on arriving in Paris?"

"Oh! I shall say that I have lost my ticket, and pay my fare."

"Where from? From Melun?"

"No, certainly not," was the quick reply. "No one must know where I came from, and if I spoke of Melun, this story of a lost ticket would attract the railway officials' attention, and I am anxious to avoid that. I would rather jump from the train before it reaches the station."

"Jump from the train?" exclaimed Paul de Lizy; "that would certainly be the worst thing you could do. You would probably be killed, and even if you were not, you would certainly be arrested by one of the guards, and only released after a thorough investigation."

"That's true," remarked the stranger, dejectedly. "Perhaps it will be best for me to go on to the station, and when I am questioned, I can answer that I came from—well, any town on the line, and pay the conductor anything he asks. He may be satisfied with my explanations, and allow me to go my way."

"I hope so, indeed, and I assure you that I shall place no obstacles in your way. It is said that all husbands support one another: bachelors should surely do the same."

"Then you are a bachelor? I fancied so, and I congratulate you."

"The moment seems rather ill-chosen," said Paul, smiling. "You are an example of the dangers of single blessedness, for if you had been married, sir, it is not probable that you would have broken like that into a railway carriage at the risk of being treated like a highway robber, for you very narrowly escaped having your brains blown out."

"But you did not fire, sir, and I shall always remain your debtor. I hope some day to repay the debt of gratitude I owe you, and chance may perhaps furnish me with an opportunity of doing so; but I am ignorant who you are, and I do not venture to ask your name."

"I understand; you would consider yourself bound to tell me yours, and you prefer that it should remain a secret. But I have no reason whatever for concealing mine. I am Paul de Lizy, and I reside on the Place de la Madeleine."

"Ah! I was sure I had seen you somewhere. We met a few Sundays ago in the Champs Elysées. I was with an acquaintance who had met you at Madame de Marcenac's, and who mentioned your name to me as he bowed to you in passing."

Paul started, he had not expected to hear the stranger allude to a lady who engrossed so many of his thoughts, and he at first felt a strong desire to question this singular individual about the friend who knew her; however, he resisted the temptation. "I cannot help thinking that you exaggerate your danger," he remarked cheerfully. "However vindictive and influential the husband may be, he certainly cannot set the entire Parisian police force on the alert at five o'clock in the morning merely to arrest a person whom he is jealous of; and even if he had the power, the telegraph office at Melun is hardly open at this hour of the night."

"The town office is closed," said the stranger, shaking his head, "but a telegram can be sent from one railway station to another at any hour. I really feel anything but comfortable, and indeed I have resolved to risk a leap from the train. I shall not postpone it much longer. We have just passed Maisons-Alfort; I am in hopes that the driver will soon slacken speed, and I shall take advantage of the opportunity."

"You would only meet with certain death. I will not allow it," interposed M. de Lizy, quickly. "There must be some other means of escaping the surveillance of this man whom you seem to regard as a perfect ogre."

"Yes, there is another way; but it is hardly for me to suggest it."

"Pray silence your scruples, and speak!"

"The only way I can think of is for you to give me your ticket."

"That's a fact. The idea never occurred to me; but it is a most excellent one. I have no injured husband upon my conscience. Besides, I can easily prove that I did not get in at Melun. My luggage is all registered from Lyons. I shall only have to show my receipt for it."

"Then you come from Lyons?"

"I spent last night there; but I really come from Monte-Carlo, where

I won a very large sum of money which I have about my person. You can now understand why I should not have hesitated to send a bullet through your head if you had insisted upon approaching too near to me. It would have been a mistake on my part, and one for which I should never have consoled myself; and to atone for my hasty impulse, I will gladly incur the slight annoyance of a talk with the railway officials. Here is my ticket," added Paul, presenting the bit of pasteboard to his companion.

"You have saved my life," said that interesting personage, pressing Paul's hand with a great display of gratitude. "But you must allow me to pay you the price of this ticket."

And fumbling in his pocket, the stranger pulled out a handful of gold and bank-notes, selected a louis, wrapped it in a fifty-franc note, which he offered to Lizy, who put the whole in his pocket, remarking gaily: "Now you have nothing to fear. So far as I myself am concerned, I do not anticipate any trouble. It isn't unusual for a traveller to lose his ticket; such cases happen every day. So you owe me nothing for a service you would certainly have rendered me, if our positions had been reversed. But take my advice, and do not indulge in any such escapades in future, for you may not always escape so easily."

"Oh, I am going to turn over a new leaf," replied the stranger, earnestly. "I have had a narrow escape, and I swear that this nocturnal excursion shall be the last. If I ever travel on this line again, it will only be to make a trip to Monte-Carlo like you have done."

"May you be as successful there as I have been. But we shall reach the station in a few moments, and in your interest we ought not to appear to know each other. It would be advisable, too, for us to change seats. Mine is on the side where passengers get out. Take it, and I will go to the other end of the compartment, and pretend to be asleep. You can get out before the conductor wakes me and I have my explanation with him."

The stranger needed no urging, but with a few words of thanks, installed himself near the door on the left side of the compartment. Paul noticed that he put away the handkerchief in which his wounded hand had been wrapped, and that he turned his coat-collar up round his ears, after adjusting his blue spectacles, and touching his false beard to see if it were properly in place.

The train had slackened its speed, and everything indicated that the terminus was near at hand. Indeed the train soon drew up in front of a platform, and a porter cried out: "Show your tickets, if you please." Paul pretended to be asleep, but he had only partially closed his eyes, and he saw two men who did not wear the railway company's uniform, promenading along the platform. "They look like detectives," he thought. "It would be funny if they had come to arrest my companion. Well, I wash my hands of him now, and I am in no danger of being taken for him, for we do not resemble each other in the least."

There were but few passengers on the train, and the guard's round was quickly made. Paul heard the doors slam, one after another, and the sound came rapidly nearer. "Farewell, monsieur; and once more let me assure you of my gratitude," said the stranger, in a low tone.

Resolved to play his part to perfection, Paul replied merely by a nod, and resumed his sleepy attitude. Almost at the same instant a guard made his appearance, lantern in hand. "Tickets, gentlemen!" he said.

The mysterious stranger resigned his, and rose to leave the compartment. "Not yet, sir," interposed the guard. "The train will move on

in a moment. We are still about fifty yards from the station." Then entering the compartment, he cried: "Sir, eh, sir! Your ticket, please!"

Paul started up like a man suddenly aroused from sleep, and began to rummage in his pockets, muttering: "Oh, yes; my ticket! Where did I put it? I cannot find it anywhere. I have perhaps lost it."

"Look for it, sir, if you please."

"That is exactly what I am doing, but I can't find it. I give up the attempt, and will pay my fare over again."

"Not to me, sir," said the guard, raising his lantern so as to examine Paul's face. "You must explain matters to the superintendent."

"Explain indeed! I don't know when or where I lost my ticket."

Instead of replying, the guard stepped to the door, called a porter, whispered a word in his ear, and remained upon the footboard, while the porter finished collecting the tickets. "It is strange that he does not settle the matter at once," thought Paul. "Can he consider me a suspicious character? I shall have no difficulty in convincing him to the contrary, however; and I won't betray my travelling-companion, as I have promised to keep his secret. It was unwise of me to do so, perhaps, but there is no help for it now."

His travelling-companion seemed entirely at his ease, and gave his attention to lighting a cigar, an operation which enabled him to keep his head lowered, with both of his hands in front of his face.

"He is a crafty fellow," thought Paul, who was furtively watching him. "So far the guard has paid no attention to him, and I hope he will manage to get away. I really begin to believe that the poor devil would have been caught but for me, but I don't understand by what authority the husband could have him arrested; still there may have been a scuffle, blows and wounds, or something of the kind."

A sudden ring announced that the collection of the tickets was over; the engine gave a short, shrill whistle, and then the train moved slowly on again. The door of our friend's compartment was the only one that remained open. The conductor held it, and guarded the way out.

The two men Paul had already observed upon the platform closely followed the train, which soon drew up near the gateway by which passengers usually leave the terminus. The occupants of the other compartments rushed out as usual, each hoping to be the first to reach the cabs and omnibuses which were waiting in the courtyard. "Pass out, sir, if you wish," said the guard, standing aside to give the stranger an opportunity of alighting—an opportunity which was speedily turned to good account.

Lizy saw his singular companion spring nimbly out upon the platform, and disappear among the crowd in the twinkling of an eye. The victory was won. The man had nothing more to fear, and, relieved of all responsibility now that he had kept his word, Paul resolved to put an end to his own absurd situation as soon as possible. Having nothing more to conceal, he assumed an entirely different tone with the guard, and said, drily: "Well, where is the superintendent to whom I am to pay the fare you refuse to receive? I have no time to spare."

"I will take you to his office," was the reply; "but we must wait until the other passengers are gone."

"I repeat that I am in a hurry."

"I am sorry; but I have my orders, and must obey them."

"Orders! You certainly must be jesting. How long have travellers been treated like prisoners, pray? But do me the favour to let me pass."

Paul had already risen and rolled up his travelling-rug. While he was buckling the straps, the guard motioned to the two men we have previously mentioned, and they immediately came up and stationed themselves one on either side of the open door. There was no longer any possible room for doubt. These men were unquestionably detectives, and M. de Lizy was in their custody, like any ordinary criminal.

Somewhat annoyed on realising this fact, although still much amused by the absurdity of his position, he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders: "I don't feel disposed to enter into any discussion with you. I prefer to make my complaint to some person in authority."

"You have only to follow me," replied the guard, rather tartly.

Accordingly Lizy, with his courier-bag still hanging about his neck, and his rug under his arm, hastily alighted. He saw the two detectives take their places behind him, and he also perceived, grouped upon the platform, several men, wearing caps trimmed with silver lace, who seemed to look at him with great curiosity and attention.

At last the guard stopped short before a glass-door bearing the significant inscription: "Commissary of Police," and bade Paul pass in.

"So I am treated like a fugitive from justice!" thought M. de Lizy. "I would give five louis if they tried to handcuff me. This is an experience that I shall probably never enjoy again."

Passing through the doorway he found himself in the presence of a grave-looking personage, who was seated at a desk, and who motioned him to take a cane-seated chair that stood near by.

Lizy would not condescend to accept the invitation, but remained standing, looking straight at the commissary, who was examining him attentively, and who was evidently surprised by the manner and appearance of the supposed culprit who had been brought before him. The guard approached the commissary respectfully, said a few words which Paul did not hear, and then rejoined the two detectives near the door.

"Your name?" asked the commissary of police.

"I don't see what my name has to do with the matter," replied Paul, depositing his travelling-rug upon a chair. "I was not asked my name when I purchased my ticket at the Lyons station, and I don't see why I should give it when I pay the price of the ticket I lost on the road."

"This is a different matter, and I advise you to change your tone."

"Begin by changing your own, if you please."

"Mine is the tone that befits a magistrate; but yours is certainly not the tone that befits a prisoner."

"A prisoner for what crime? For having lost my ticket? I was not aware that losing one's ticket was forbidden by the penal code."

The magistrate waited a moment, as if to make his words more impressive, and then said sternly: "You are accused of theft and murder."

Paul de Lizy broke into such a frank and ringing laugh that the commissary almost bounded from his chair. "Do you intend to feign lunacy?" he exclaimed, so greatly was he amazed by this unseasonable mirth.

"By no means," replied Paul. "If there is any lunatic present, it certainly is not I."

Here his questioner's patience entirely deserted him. "I warn you," he said drily, "that if you persist in this unseemly behaviour, I shall send you to the station-house at once."

Such a journey had no attraction for Paul de Lizy, and the threat made him change his manner. He was not averse to having a little amusement

at this magistrate's expense, but he did not care to spend twenty-four hours, and perhaps longer, in a prisoner's cell. "Sir," he began, more politely, "you cannot wonder if I am greatly surprised that the loss of my ticket should be the cause of my being accused of murder. Have the goodness to be more explicit. I shall have no difficulty in explaining my innocence. Whom have I murdered?"

His tone had again become ironical, and the commissary retorted: "You pretend that you come from Lyons, I believe?"

"I certainly do; and I will satisfy you that such is the fact, if you like. It is a very easy matter. Although I have lost my ticket, I haven't lost the receipt for my luggage. Here it is, and you can see that my trunk was registered last evening at the Lyons station."

The commissary took the receipt, examined it carefully, and said, after a moment's silence: "It will also be necessary for you to prove that this luggage belongs to you. You were not the only occupant of the compartment in which you travelled, and the person who was with you may have dropped this. He, also, came from Lyons, I understand."

"Do you suppose that the gentleman would not have claimed his luggage in that case? Send to the luggage-room, and see if his is there. A man does not abandon his luggage without at least a protest. But if that is not sufficient proof, take me to the luggage-room, and satisfy yourself that the trunk which I will identify as mine bears the same number as that on my receipt. I have the keys to my trunk, my bag, and my dressing-case. I will open them in your presence, and I trust that, after this test, you will no longer doubt my innocence, for even if I had succeeded in stealing the receipt and keys of my travelling-companion, I could not identify the luggage, or state its contents, as I will do, if you desire it."

This plain and straightforward statement evidently made an impression upon the commissary of police, for he rejoined more quietly: "We will see in a moment if your assertions are correct. But tell me first who you are. If you have nothing to conceal, there is no reason why you should refuse to tell me the name you declined to give a few moments ago."

"I am the Baron Paul de Lizy, formerly an officer, and even now a captain in the reserve. I live at No. 22 Place de la Madeleine, on the second floor. I have not the certificate of my birth about me, but I was thirty-five years of age three months ago. My valet, a young man named Antoine, must be waiting for me outside the station, and he will confirm these statements, if my own word is not sufficient. Send for him."

The commissary made a sign to one of the detectives who immediately left the room. The worthy commissary really did not know what to think. He was almost willing to admit that he had made a mistake, but Paul's impertinent replies had naturally offended him, and he was determined to have perfect proof of the truth of the prisoner's statements. "I see that I shall owe my restoration to liberty to my servant's testimony," continued Lizy, half-laughingly, and half contemptuously; "still I shall be none the less grateful to you for granting him a hearing. But while we are waiting for him, I should be infinitely obliged if you would tell me what murder you refer to. Was any one killed in the train?"

"You know there was not," replied the commissary, looking at him intently.

"I know nothing at all about it. I fell asleep immediately after we reached Dijon, and all the passengers in the other compartments might



have been killed without my knowing anything about it. I myself felt no fear, for I had an excellent revolver in my pocket."

"So you are armed?"

"Yes; it is a precaution I always take when I travel by rail, and this time I was not likely to neglect it, for I have about me a very large sum of money I won at Monaco."

"By gambling?"

"Yes; it seems almost incredible; but I can show you the money."

At that moment the detective returned, and informed the commissary that he could find no one in or about the station answering to the name of Antoine, although he had repeatedly shouted for Monsieur de Lizy's valet.

"Not seeing me leave the station with the other passengers, he must have concluded that I had missed the train, and have quietly returned home. I have been detained here at least twenty minutes, and the fellow, of course, became tired of waiting," remarked Paul.

The commissary shook his head, and said with an ominous frown: "One of your statements is already shown to be false. I fear it will be the same with the others, and——"

"Satisfy yourself at once, then," Paul interrupted, impatiently. "The luggage-room is not far off; let us go there immediately. Afterwards, if you are not fully convinced, accompany me to my home, where my concierge will identify me. Let us put an end to this, for it is outrageous to detain an honourable gentleman under the pretext of looking for the perpetrator of some murder."

"Your insolence will not prevent me from questioning you."

"Question me as much as you like, but let us get at the facts of the case. You speak of a crime. Pray, be more explicit?"

"When did you see Monsieur Basfroi last?" suddenly inquired the commissary, with his eyes riveted on Paul's face.

"BASFROI? Who is he? I have never even heard of him."

"Then you have never been to Fontainebleau?"

"Yes; for the races, of course; and I have also hunted there occasionally. But why do you ask me that?"

"Did you not return from Fontainebleau last evening?"

"Certainly not, as I came from Lyons by the express. But what is the meaning of all these mysterious questions? BASFROI!—Fontainebleau!—I don't understand you."

"You will soon do so. Monsieur Basfroi was a very rich old man, who resided in a lonely house near Fontainebleau. He was murdered last night, and a very large sum of money was stolen from his safe."

"And you imagine I did it? Really, this is too absurd!"

"The assassin was seen as he leaped from the window," continued the commissary, "and he was pursued, but not overtaken. We have a description of him, however, and we know that he was not a labouring man."

"And as I am not a labouring man, you conclude that I am the culprit? You are inclined to jump at conclusions, it seems to me."

"We are also certain that the murderer returned to Paris by rail, and that he must have got into the train without a ticket; and as the crime was committed shortly before midnight, and there has been no train since, except the one which just came in, it is evident that the culprit must have taken it, not at Fontainebleau, but at Melun. He ran nearly thirteen miles across the fields, in four hours."

"I am utterly incapable of performing such a feat."

"I received a telegram at about one o'clock informing me of these facts, and I gave my subordinates orders to arrest any traveller who was without a ticket. You are the only person found in such a condition. You have heard the particulars; now, clear yourself if you can."

Paul de Lizy made no response; not that he had any fears about his final vindication, but he was wondering if it would not be as well to tell the whole truth. A man is not obliged to keep a promise made to a scoundrel. And yet, although appearances were certainly against the mysterious stranger, Paul reflected that a man who was even but indirectly acquainted with Madame de Marcenac could not be guilty of robbery and assassination. "I can get out of the scrape without denouncing him," said the young fellow to himself. "I would do so, however, if I were sure that he was a scoundrel; but I shall wait until I *am* sure of it, and the commissary has not yet succeeded in convincing me."

"Your story strongly resembles a romance," he remarked aloud to the official. "As you are a commissary, your statement must, of course, be accepted without any reservation whatever; and yet, there are certain things which I cannot explain in your account. You say that the assassin boarded the train at Melun. How can you be certain of that?"

"You have no right whatever to question me," replied the commissary; "still, under the circumstances, I don't mind telling you that another telegram sent from Melun, after the departure of the train, informed me that a man was seen scaling the fence which incloses the line a short distance from the station. The porter who saw him lost a good deal of time, and the train had started again before he informed the station-master; but the latter at once advised me of the fact. Perhaps you will ask why he attached so much importance to an incident which is of such frequent occurrence; but in spite of the hour at which the crime was committed all Fontainebleau had heard of it. Monsieur Basfroi was very well known, and last evening there was a fête which kept the majority of the population up unusually late. My colleagues, the commissary of the Fontainebleau station and the chief of the town police, thought that the murderer would try to return to Paris as soon as possible, and they warned the station-masters of all the intermediate localities, so that they might be on the watch. You succeeded in outwitting them, but I was waiting for you here. You were caught, and, instead of attempting an impossible defence, you had better tell the truth."

"But I *have* told you the truth; and there is nothing—except, perhaps, your own inclination—to prevent you from satisfying yourself that I am really the Baron de Lizy, and that I have come straight from Lyons after a visit to Monte-Carlo. The servants of the Grand Hôtel where I stayed at Lyons, will testify that I left there last evening at ten minutes past seven o'clock, and such being the case, I could hardly have murdered an old man at Fontainebleau at a quarter to twelve. There is also my luggage to prove the truth of what I say. Let me open my trunks, and afterwards take you to the Place de la Madeleine where I reside."

The commissary remained silent, but his conviction seemed to be considerably shaken, and Paul, taking advantage of the effect his arguments had produced, added, by way of conclusion: "And as I have no desire to defraud the railroad company, allow me to pay you the price of my ticket. I lost it; so much the worse for me. It is only fair that I should pay for my carelessness, and as I meant to do so I had my money ready."

This was a blunder, for the commissary at once decided that the tra-

veller must have had some ulterior motive in putting aside the small amount which he now drew from his vest-pocket, and finally deposited upon the desk. It consisted of a louis and a fifty-franc note, which the suspicious commissary at once proceeded to examine.

"Will you explain how this bank-note happens to be stained with blood?" he asked, suddenly.

"Stained with blood! You must be mistaken, sir."

"But I tell you that it is. Look!" And the commissary exhibited the note to Lizy's astonished eyes. The scrap of paper was indeed covered with large crimson stains which appeared still fresh. "It seems to me," said the commissary, "that this note bears the impress of two bloody fingers; and it is so crumpled that it must have been caught up and crushed tightly together with many others."

Paul now recollected that the pocket of his travelling companion had been filled to overflowing with a quantity of equally crumpled notes, all probably acquired in the same evil way; and, being a sensible man, he no longer doubted but what the perpetrator of the Fontainebleau crime had travelled in the same compartment with himself from Melun to Paris, and that but for his, Paul's credulity, the scoundrel would have been caught by the detectives who were awaiting him. He realised his mistake; but he was still in doubt as to whether the right moment had arrived for denouncing the crafty malefactor who had personated a gay Lothario so successfully. "Well," resumed the magistrate, "how do you explain these red marks? Have you several notes similarly stained?"

"Those I placed in my bag are all clean," replied Paul. "The bank of Monte-Carlo pays in new notes. I can show them to you, and I can also show you a bill of exchange for three hundred thousand francs given me by a banker in Nice on the day before yesterday. You surely will not pretend that I took it from the safe of the man at Fontainebleau."

As he spoke, M. de Lizy unlocked the bag suspended from his shoulder, drew from it the bill of exchange, and handed it to the commissary, who subjected it to a careful examination. It was impossible to doubt its authenticity, and the commissary found it difficult to persist in accusing a man, who carried with him such a fortune as this, of having committed a frightful crime for mere gain. "You ought to have told me this in the first place," said the magistrate, reproachfully.

"I did not think of it," answered Paul. "I was so surprised at being treated like a common criminal, and you plied me with so many questions. Had I been guilty, I could have defended myself much better."

"I believe you are right, sir," said the worthy commissary. "Professional criminals always have a host of plausible explanations ready."

"I gave you several, but you did not consider them worthy of the slightest attention. I had quite forgotten the best possible proof of my innocence. Now you have it in your hands. you can no longer suspect me, and I trust you will allow me to take leave of you without further delay."

"Excuse me, sir; we have not finished," was the reply. "I cannot decide upon your case. Your assertions must be confirmed by the evidence of others, and my superiors must be consulted. You must see the chief of police in the morning, and you will be obliged to wait at the prefecture until we can send for the railway porter who saw the assassin climb the fence, and for the persons who pursued him. They will certainly arrive by the afternoon, and if they do not identify you——"

"Thanks!" exclaimed Paul, whose patience was now quite exhausted. "I prefer to tell you what I know of the man you are looking for."

"Then you admit that you know him?" exclaimed the commissary.

"Yes, by sight," Paul replied, "and yet I am not sure I should recognise him again, unless he wore a false beard and blue spectacles, as he did this morning. But I can tell you how he was dressed, and give you some other information respecting him. He is a tall, stalwart fellow, whose manners are unexceptionable, upon my word! and he wore a black frock-coat, dark trousers, and a tall hat which was muddy, but new."

"This description corresponds perfectly with that which we have been given of the assassin. Had he any overcoat?"

"No."

"He threw his away so that he might run more quickly, and his pursuers picked it up on the road to Melun, just outside Fontainebleau."

"It may help you in discovering him. It probably bears the name of the tailor who made it."

"Begin, if you please, by telling me where you first met this man."

"In the train."

"You must be jesting."

"Not at all. I repeat that the man was in the train which just arrived, and that he must, by this time, be in a place of safety, for he was allowed to escape while your emissaries were arresting me, and he made the most of his time, I assure you."

"How do you know? Was he in the same compartment as you?"

"He was. If you do not believe me, ask the intelligent guard who brought me here. He has not been very polite to me, but he was very polite to the other man."

"There *was* a passenger in the same compartment who was attired in the manner the gentleman describes," said the guard in response to a sign from the commissary; "but this passenger had a ticket from Lyons."

"Mine!" exclaimed Paul.

"What! you pretend he stole it from you! That can't be. You would have discovered the fact, and claimed your property."

"He did not steal my ticket; I gave it to him of my own accord, or rather, I sold it to him, for he paid me what it cost."

"So you are his accomplice?"

"By no means. But he represented himself to be a fugitive lover pursued by a jealous husband, and I was fool enough to believe him. He entered my compartment just after the train left Melun, and, thinking he was a thief, I began by threatening to blow his brains out. But he stoutly protested that he had no evil designs, and that he had only entered the compartment because he thought it was unoccupied. Then he proceeded to tell his story. He had just been surprised by a husband whose wife resides in a château near Melun, and he had barely had time to leap from a window and make his escape. He had hurt his hand by falling upon a hawthorn hedge, and as he might incur great risk of recognition in the town or at the station, he had resorted to this mode of returning to Paris."

"But this story was utterly absurd and impossible!"

"Why? Under such circumstances, any gentleman would incur equal risk to avoid compromising a lady. I had not the slightest suspicion of the real facts, and this man did not resemble an assassin in the least. Even now, knowing what I do, I am sure that he moves and has always moved in the best society. His manners and language indicate this un-

mistakably. I am not a commissary of police or a clairvoyant, and I was deceived, as many others would have been under the same circumstances."

"But there was nothing to compel you to give him your ticket."

"Certainly not, and I never once thought of doing so until he declared that he was going to jump from the train before it reached Paris, even at the risk of his life. He pretended that the husband was a very influential personage, and that he had undoubtedly telegraphed to the police here to be at the station. This seemed to me rather strange; but I did not give the matter much thought, and as I did not want the man to break his neck, I very willingly acceded to his proposal that I should let him have my ticket. You know the rest."

"If what you say is true, you have been guilty of the greatest and most unpardonable imprudence. But you must have had considerable conversation with him, and you may have gathered sundry information which will assist us in our search for him."

"Not at all, sir. He did not tell me his name, nor did I ask it. I told him mine, and he said he had heard one of his friends speak of me. This would seem to indicate that he is no stranger to the circle in which I move, although he may not have told the truth. Still, perhaps, I may meet him again, and even recognise him, in spite of the disguise he wore, and if this happens, I promise you that I will not lose sight of him."

The commissary's mind was made up. "Here is your bill of exchange, sir," he said. "But I shall not return you the fifty-franc note. It may be of use by-and-bye. However, I am now ready to accompany you home after you have identified your baggage."

Replacing the bill of exchange in his courier bag, Paul followed the commissary to the luggage-room, where he opened his trunk, and had no difficulty in proving that it belonged to him; for inside there was a packet of letters addressed to him at the Hôtel de Paris, Monte-Carlo.

To establish his innocence completely, it was only necessary to repair, with the commissary, to the Place de la Madeleine, where he occupied apartments in a handsome house. So he engaged a cab; the commissary took a seat beside him, and one of the detectives posted himself on the box. The conversation did not once flag during the drive. Paul never bore malice long; besides, he was very well pleased to see himself out of the scrape, so he made himself very agreeable, and spoke of his experiences with his fellow-traveller with so much freedom that the last lingering suspicions of the worthy commissary were entirely dispelled.

On reaching home, Paul was not much surprised to find his valet, who had returned from the station, chatting with the doorkeeper in the latter's room, but he was greatly astonished when the doorkeeper handed him a visiting-card which a gentleman had left about an hour before. The name and address had been scratched out with a penknife, but upon the card there were these words, written in pencil: "Thanks. Rely upon my gratitude. If you ever have need of me, I shall know it, and you will find me ready."

This message could have come only from Paul's fellow-traveller. The description given by the doorkeeper who had seen him made it impossible to doubt this, and the household functionary added that the gentleman had awakened him by several loud rings at the bell, and had seemed to be in a great hurry. Paul at once handed the card to the commissary, who, being now entirely satisfied, thought it unnecessary to visit the baron's apartments. He went off, giving Paul an opportunity to go to bed at last, although he no longer felt any inclination to sleep.

## II.

BERTHA DE MARCENAC, the lady in whom Paul de Lizy was so deeply interested, was the daughter of a merchant who had made a fortune by selling woollen goods in the Rue des Bourdonnais, and who had tried all his life to raise himself above the station in which he had been born. No one is perfect; and vanity was old Plantier's besetting sin. After offering himself three times as a candidate for the votes of his fellow-citizens, and being on each occasion defeated, he had in the disgust inspired by want of success decided that he would ally himself with the aristocracy by marrying his daughter to a scion of some noble race. Nor was there anything presumptuous in such a plan, for Bertha was wonderfully pretty, intelligent, and well bred, besides possessing a dowry of five hundred thousand francs, with more than a million to come to her.

Plenty of noblemen can always be found who are more than willing to repair the ravages that dissipation has wrought in their fortunes by an alliance with the attractive daughter of a wealthy plebeian. Now, although the Count Adhémar de Marcenac had reached the age of forty, he was still quite equal to the task of pleasing a young girl who had just left the boarding-school where her father, a widower, had kept her until she was eighteen. Bertha had felt very lonely in the paternal mansion, and she knew nothing whatever of life; and so, in spite of the disparity in age, very little urging was required to induce her to marry an attractive gentleman who bore his years lightly and seemed to be deeply in love with her. He was not unpleasing to her, or was she sorry to become a countess, and enter on terms of equality into a social circle the doors of which were closed to the mere daughter of M. Plantier, the well-known merchant.

She deported herself very creditably in her new station, and her husband proved very devoted during the first year of their married life. They even lived on excellent terms with old Plantier, who never neglected an opportunity of referring to the "Count de Marcenac, my son-in-law," and lauding him to the skies. Unfortunately, however, the count belonged to a family which had been noted for its reckless extravagance from time immemorial. From father to son, the Marcenacs had ruined themselves and others, and handsome Adhémar proved to be no exception to the rule. After a few months had elapsed, he resumed his former habits, began to gamble at his club, and bet heavily at the races. He could not touch the capital of his wife's dowry, having married her under a settlement; but he disposed of the income so quickly that the couple were soon deeply in debt, and it was necessary to appeal to old Plantier, who began by grumbling and finally died of chagrin. Bertha, deprived of her natural protector, was subjected to a severe ordeal; and as she often lacked courage to refuse her signature to M. de Marcenac, who continued to borrow money right and left, she was in great danger of being reduced to poverty when, some seven months after her father's death, she suddenly became a widow.

After a quarrel, the cause of which she never knew, her husband was killed in a duel by a Russian. They had had no children; so she was left alone in the world, still possessing a handsome fortune, which the wasteful Adhémar had not had time enough to seriously impair. She was then about twenty-four; prettier than ever, although she had suffered not a little; and she possessed a well-deserved reputation for virtue, for, despite her

husband's transgressions, her own conduct had been irreproachable. She was regarded as a martyr and a saint; in short, she had gained the sympathies of a circle in which charity toward others is not particularly the rule.

Paul de Lizy had been introduced to her by her husband, to whom he was slightly related, a Lizy having married a Marcenac under the Restoration. But while her husband lived, their acquaintanceship had not extended beyond the limits of common politeness, for Paul had no great fondness for Adhémar, and strongly disapproved of his conduct. However, he contented himself with pitying his relative's wife, without trying to console her. Later on, after her husband's death, he met her again, seldom at first, then more frequently, until at last he went to see her almost every day, without, however, formally announcing himself as a suitor for her hand. He thought her too rich; besides, the recollection of her husband annoyed him a little: he had known his character too well. But it was now time to take a decisive step. He had brought with him from Monaco some four hundred thousand francs, which, added to what he already possessed, made his fortune nearly equal to that of Bertha de Marcenac. However, he still hesitated.

The day after his strange adventure in the train, he rose about noon, only partially rested from his journey, and with his mind full of the peculiar experience which had befallen him. Antoine, his valet, informed him that no letters or visitors had come that morning, and Paul concluded that the affair was ended so far as he was concerned. Indeed, he almost began to think that his travelling companion had not committed the crime of which he was accused.

"No assassin would have left his visiting card," he thought. "Even if he scratched out his name and address he left two lines of his handwriting to thank me for my services. A criminal would not have left anything behind him that might have helped the police to capture him. But what the deuce did he mean by saying: 'If you have need of me, I shall know it.' How will he know it? He must be acquainted with some friend of mine, and he must have spoken the truth when he told me that one of his friends had often met me at the house of Madame de Marcenac. He doubtless depends upon this friend to keep him informed of my movements. It is strange, and I must speak to the countess about it."

These reflections, and others of a similar nature, engrossed Paul's attention until three o'clock, when he proceeded to make a careful toilet with a view to calling upon Madame de Marcenac, who was always at home between five and seven in the evening. The countess might almost be called a neighbour, as she resided in the Avenue Gabriel, but a short distance from the Place de la Madeleine. The main entrance to the house was in the Faubourg Saint Honoré; but intimate friends were allowed to enter by the garden, and so Paul crossed the Place de la Concorde, and proceeded along the footpath on the right hand side of the main avenue of the Champs Elysées. He had not taken a hundred steps before he met a dozen acquaintances who bowed to him; and all of a sudden he perceived a gentleman whose face he seemed to recollect more or less distinctly. "Where the deuce have I seen that face?" he said to himself.

The gentleman in turn seemed to gaze at Paul with marked attention; and as they came face to face, he stopped short and exclaimed: "I certainly cannot be mistaken. This is Paul de Lizy."

"And I recollect your face perfectly well, although I cannot remember your name."

"It is Jacques Sigoulès."

"My old lieutenant?"

"The same, my dear fellow. I felt sure we should meet again some time or other. But it is eleven years since I last set foot in France; I have been nine in Algeria, and two in Tunis. However, I have just been promoted to a lieutenant-colonelcy, and have obtained a furlough. What pleasure it gives me to meet an old comrade again!"

"It gives me equal pleasure, I assure you. How long have you been in Paris?"

"About a month, and I am stopping at the Hôtel Continental. I came here to enjoy myself, but I must admit that up to the present time I have been frightfully bored. In fact I am acquainted with no one in Paris except yourself, and I did not know your address. Now, however, that I have found you, I shall not let you go, I warn you."

"Then you are not married yet?"

"No. How is it with you?"

"I am not married; but it is quite probable that I shall be soon."

"I am sorry to hear that. I relied upon you to pilot me through the gay world with which you are thoroughly acquainted, no doubt. During the whole month I have spent in Paris I have not met with a single adventure, though I lost my heart soon after arriving here, but my charmer proved obdurate, and all my admiration was thrown away."

"Where did you meet this cruel fair one?"

"In the train one day, while returning from Fontainebleau."

On hearing his old comrade speak of Fontainebleau, Paul de Lizy pricked up his ears. The name of the place would have made no impression upon him twenty-four hours earlier; but now, the effect it produced was marvellous. "What the deuce were you doing at Fontainebleau? Visiting the castle or exploring the forest?"

"Neither; I went to see a captain of hussars who is now stationed there, and who formerly served in my regiment, a man named Vedrines; but you don't know him. Well, I stayed to mess; and champagne, punch and all the accessories flowed so freely, that I was perhaps just a trifle tipsy when the officers accompanied me to the last train, which leaves at twenty minutes past ten. Just as I reached the station, a lady who was standing at the ticket-office attracted my attention. She had a superb figure, and although I could not see her features, for she was closely veiled, I said to myself: 'A woman who is so beautifully formed cannot fail to have a charming face.' She proceeded straight towards the first-class carriages, and I followed her, at a little distance, and without appearing to do so. As she stepped into one of the compartments, I caught a glimpse of a tiny and daintily shod foot."

"It was probably some 'irregular' who had come to Fontainebleau to dine with a cadet of the military school," exclaimed Paul.

"You are very much mistaken, old fellow; I thought so at first myself, and I entered the same compartment a few moments afterwards. The only other occupant was a worthy man who fell asleep five minutes after the train started, and who only awoke in time to get out at Villeneuve Saint Georges. But although I tried my best to start a flirtation, the lady did not pay the slightest attention to me, and when I endeavoured to engage her in conversation by making some allusion to the most picturesque spots in the forest, she only answered in monosyllables. But I could see that she was secretly laughing at me."



"What made you think so?" asked Paul, smiling.

"No matter; only I'm not such a simpleton as you suppose. I then changed my tactics, and told her who I was, and why I had gone to Fontainebleau, what I intended to do in Paris during my furlough, adding that I had not set foot in France before for eleven years."

"You gave her your complete history, then. She must have been greatly entertained."

"I do not know about that; but I mingled with it an account of so many military exploits and adventures that I finally succeeded in making her laugh and talk. She seemed particularly interested in our famous campaign of the month of January, '71; and referred to it so often that I fancied she must have known some one engaged in it. I did not question her on the point, however, for I could see very plainly that I had to deal with a real lady. Her voice, manners, language, in short, everything about her indicated it unmistakably."

"And yet you say she was travelling alone at eleven o'clock at night?"

"Oh, as to that, I think she was taking a little excursion merely for the fun of the thing. She was evidently determined to preserve her incognito, and, although she consented to reply to some of my remarks, it was only because she felt sure that she would never meet me again, and that I did not belong to her set. When the old gentleman left the train I asked my charming travelling companion if she would like me to go into another compartment and thus spare her a *tête-à-tête* which might be irksome to her. She hesitated a moment, and then replied: 'I thank you for your kind intentions, sir, but I am sure that you are an honourable man, and I beg you will remain. There are still two or three stations, and other travellers less considerate than yourself might come in. I prefer not to be alone.' I saw that she was in earnest, so I did my best to prove myself worthy of her confidence. I tried, in a quiet way, of course, to find out something about her life and acquaintances; but I did not even succeed in discovering whether she was married or single. Still I am sure that she is rich, for once an allusion to her box at the opera, and her horses, escaped her. That is all I know, for though I set a trap for her by mentioning several officers who had served in Africa, and who are now members of the Jockey Club, and well known in Paris, she gave no sign of ever having heard of them. I even spoke of you as one of my oldest and best friends."

"With what result?" asked Lizy.

"She gave no sign, as I said before."

"Probably because she did not know me."

"I am not so sure of that. She is a very clever woman, I tell you. When the train reached Paris she favoured me with the following little speech: 'I don't know, sir, whether chance will ever bring us into each other's presence again, but should such a thing happen, I rely upon your delicacy and discretion, and I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will pretend that you have never met me.'"

"And did you submit to such a curt dismissal?"

"Yes; I tried to escort her to a cab, but she told me very plainly that she would prefer to go alone. I followed her at a distance, however, and saw her take a cab—No. 1919, I noticed."

"Well, you might have ascertained the driver's address at the prefecture of police, and for a handsome gratuity he would have told you where he had driven the lady."

"True; I had not thought of that."

"Still, I should not advise you to take the trouble. Your great lady is probably only an 'irregular.' She was pretty, of course, for I do not suppose she could have infatuated you to such an extent without showing you her face."

"She lifted her veil once or twice, and I saw that she was a charming blonde, with dark eyes, a small, tip-tilted nose, a rather large mouth, and superb teeth. She had a refined but piquant face, a sweet voice, and such a smile——"

"You are giving a perfect description of a lady I know," said Paul, greatly surprised; "but I doubt if there is much resemblance between the two. How long is it since you met with this adventure?"

"A week ago on Saturday."

"Saturday is the day I reached Monaco."

"Have you been to Monaco?"

"Yes, and won a large amount there. A most productive and eventful trip it proved. It is astonishing how many exciting incidents occur on the Lyons railway line! I had an adventure myself, but of an entirely different nature to yours. However, I will tell you about it one of these days, for, now, old fellow, I must leave you."

"What! leave me, when I have scarcely seen you for a quarter of an hour?"

"I must; I have a call to make. But I can dine with you. I will be at the Café du Helder at seven o'clock; meet me there. And yet, if Madame de Marcenac should not happen to be at home, I can rejoin you here in ten minutes."

"Marcenac!" repeated Sigoulès. "Why, I knew a rascal of that name. Do you mean the wife of the Count de Marcenac, the owner of an estate in the Dordogne? If so, I fought a duel with her husband, in which he was severely wounded. I have never seen him since. His Christian name was Adhémar."

"Nor will you be likely to see him. He died three years ago, and he was slain in a duel."

"That does not surprise me in the least. I heard some one say that he had squandered all his property."

"Every penny; but he retrieved his fortunes by a wealthy marriage."

"Then this Countess de Marcenac you are going to see——"

"Is his widow—a widow twenty-four years old, with an income of eighty thousand francs. Marcenac did not have time enough to spend her fortune. That was all that saved it."

"Well, I made a fine blunder, then, when I chatted with my fair stranger on the way from Fontainebleau. In mentioning the names of all the fashionable men I knew in order to try her, I spoke of Count Adhémar de Marcenac, as an acquaintance. How she must have laughed at me! She must have thought me either a liar or a fool."

"Did she say nothing when you made this blunder?"

"She had the politeness not to laugh in my face, but I did notice that she allowed the conversation to drop almost immediately."

Paul did not reply. He had suddenly become as mute as the lady in question. In fact, his friend's revelations had furnished him with abundant food for reflection, although he drew no definite conclusions from them. They had now reached the Avenue Gabriel, and were almost opposite the railing which enclosed Madame de Marcenac's garden. They parted with a cordial handshake, and the colonel, quickening his pace, proceeded to—

wards the Place de la Concorde. Paul crossed the avenue; but just as he approached the garden gate it was opened from inside, and a plainly-dressed elderly gentleman emerged, saying, as he lifted his broad-brimmed hat, "Monsieur le Baron, I have the honour of saluting you."

It was a friend of Madame de Marcenac's father—a well-known merchant, whom Paul had met several times at Bertha's house. She often consulted him on business matters, and entertained a high respect for him—a fact which induced Paul to abstain from ridiculing the old fellow's eccentricities, as he was often tempted to do. "Ah! Monsieur Chardin, is it you?" he exclaimed. "I am delighted to see you. How is Madame de Marcenac? You have just left the house, I suppose?"

"Yes; and I am very glad I came this way, as I have not only had the pleasure of meeting you, but have spared you the annoyance of being obliged to wait at the gate. Pray come in. Bertha was just speaking of you. She tells me you have been absent for a week or more."

"Yes; and I returned only this morning."

"You had a pleasant journey, I hope?"

"Exceedingly, though rather exciting towards the last. I won a large sum at Monaco, but only narrowly escaped arrest upon my arrival here. I was taken for an assassin."

"You are surely jesting."

"Not the least bit in the world. It seems that a gentleman was murdered last night, at Fontainebleau, and that the perpetrator of the crime was in the train with me, so——"

"Good heavens! we have friends at Fontainebleau!" exclaimed the old merchant. "Did you hear the name of the unfortunate victim?"

"The unfortunate victim was a very rich old man who was killed for his money," replied Paul. "His name was Basfroi."

"BASFROI!" exclaimed M. Chardin, who was pale and deeply agitated. "Why, he was an intimate friend of mine and Plantier's. We were all three of us associated together in several business enterprises, and after Basfroi retired to Fontainebleau with an independent fortune, we visited each other frequently. Ah, poor fellow! had he but listened to my advice, he would not have met with this tragical death. I always told him to reside in Paris, to deposit his money at the Bank of France, and live quietly on his income. But no; he had a perfect mania for keeping his money under his own roof, and it was this that cost him his life, no doubt."

"I fear so," replied Paul, philosophically.

"Plantier tried to dissuade him from settling in the country," resumed the old merchant. "Plantier liked him very much, although it is strange he did not almost hate him."

"And why?"

"I can tell you, as you are Bertha's friend, and as you know that her married life was anything but happy. It was through Basfroi that poor Plantier made the acquaintance of Monsieur de Marcenac. Basfroi lent money, and Monsieur de Marcenac owed him a good deal. Of course, Basfroi was anxious to get his money back, and he knew that Plantier was crazy about the aristocracy. Had the count lived, he would have ruined not only his father-in-law, but his wife; so, it would have been only natural if Plantier had felt that he had not been fairly treated."

"But tell me," interrupted Paul, "was Madame de Marcenac also acquainted with Monsieur Basfroi?"

"Oh, yes! she has known him ever since her education was completed;

and since her marriage she has often visited him, although the count did not receive the poor fellow very courteously when he presented himself here. M. de Marcenac seemed to have entirely forgotten what he owed to Basfroi; but Bertha is so kind-hearted that she always welcomed the poor man very cordially, and sometimes went to lunch with him at his little house at Fontainebleau."

"She will be overcome with consternation, then, if I tell her he has just been murdered."

"She must know the truth, however; but break it to her as gently as possible, for she is not prepared for it."

"Come back with me. You can devise some means of approaching the subject gradually."

"No, no," the old man quickly replied. "The news has upset me completely, and I should be even more at a loss for words than you. Allow me to take leave of you."

The gate was standing open. So M. Chardin slipped through it, and closed it behind him, leaving Paul to his reflections in the garden. It was almost dusk, and on glancing up, Paul perceived that all the windows were lighted. "She has been told that I have returned, and she is waiting for me," he thought. "I hope I shall find her alone."

The countess was sitting that evening in a boudoir adjoining the large drawing room. She was half reclining upon a luxurious divan, reading a letter, and did not look up when Paul de Lizy raised the silken door-hanging, after motioning the servant not to announce him. Never had she appeared so charming, and on seeing her once more he forgot all the doubts and fears which had beset him a moment before. Bertha de Marcenac was rather below the medium height, but she had a beautifully-rounded figure, with soft brown eyes, a delicate nose, teeth of dazzling whiteness, and cheeks which glowed with the delicate rose-tint familiar to Watteau's shepherdesses. Her lovely face habitually wore an expression of frank gaiety which won every heart. But on this occasion her expression was sad, or at least thoughtful, and Paul very naturally concluded that the letter she was perusing was the cause of the change.

It even occurred to him that this letter perhaps contained an announcement of M. Basfroi's death, and he would willingly have been spared the necessity of imparting the bad news. As he did not wish Bertha to think he was playing the spy upon her, he gave a slight cough. The young widow looked up, her face brightened, and after slipping the letter into her bosom she offered her hand to Paul, saying: "Is it really you, my friend? I am very glad to see you. I heard that you were in the garden; why were you so long in coming up?"

Paul imprinted a kiss on the widow's slender hand, and then replied: "I met Monsieur Chardin at the garden-gate, and he detained me longer than was agreeable, for I was anxious to see you again."

"Well, now that you are here, I shall keep you. Sit down opposite to me in that easy-chair, for I want to have a long talk with you."

Paul was not sorry to occupy a position whence he would be able to watch every change of expression on Madame de Marcenac's face during their interview. "Do you know that this is the first time for six months that I have spent a whole week away from you?" he asked.

"That is true," replied the countess, somewhat sadly. "I missed you; but it seems to me that you did not find the time very long, as you did not write to me."

"I did not dare. If you had known where I was you would have reproached me."

"By what right? You are not accountable to me for your actions. Still, I confess that I should like to know the cause of this mysterious absence, for you scarcely condescended to inform me of your intended departure."

"I have come to implore your forgiveness."

"I cannot forgive until I know what you are guilty of. Come, begin your confession," said Bertha, smiling.

"I have been to Monaco."

"You went there to gamble. That was very wrong. If you cared for me as much as you pretend you would have been cured of this ruinous passion for play long ago."

"I had not gambled since I began to visit you; and it was on your account that I went to Monte-Carlo. I wished to win an enormous sum, so as to——"

"So as to what?"

"To be as rich as you are."

"A strange ambition, truly," laughed Bertha, pretending not to understand his meaning. "Haven't you money enough to live comfortably?"

"To live alone, perhaps; but not to marry upon."

"That is, if you wish to marry a portionless young girl," remarked Madame de Marcenac, mischievously. "Ah, well! you are rich enough for two."

"I was not rich enough to marry a lady with an income of eighty thousand francs. Husband and wife ought to be on an equal footing."

"As regards character and education, certainly; but it is by no means indispensable that they should be equal in fortune. To hear you, one would imagine that you looked upon marriage as a mere business transaction."

"No, I don't, for I would marry a poor woman without the slightest hesitation, if I loved her; but if our positions were reversed, a marriage would, of course, be impossible."

"Hence, it follows that if I loved you, and you had no fortune, you would shun me without regard to the pain you might inflict upon me."

"But such is no longer the case; I was scarcely poor when I went away, and I have brought four hundred thousand francs back from Monte-Carlo."

"So much the worse," sighed the countess.

"What! so much the worse!" exclaimed Paul. "Would you rather I had returned ruined?"

A pause followed. Madame de Marcenac, who was evidently greatly agitated, sat with her eyes downcast, and seemed trying to summon up courage to take some important step. "Listen to me, my dear friend," she said at last. "You and I have both been playing a very dangerous game for several months past; and up to this very moment we both of us have apparently been unwilling to broach the subject which was uppermost in our minds. I am now satisfied concerning my own feelings, and I am convinced that you love me for myself alone. You have given abundant proofs of that; but all the same, it has not been for me to ask for your hand."

"But you might, at least, have given me some encouragement to ask for yours."

"Do you suppose that if I had cared nothing for you I should have admitted you to my house upon such an intimate footing? Do you take me

for one of those coquettes who delight in attracting adorers only to repulse them? If you think that, you do me great injustice."

"And you should do me the justice to believe that I love you too much to deceive you or compromise you."

"No, my friend, I don't accuse you of acting a part unworthy of an honourable man; but I *do* say that you have prolonged a situation which might cost both of us dear."

"But don't you understand that I have come to beseech you to put an end to it?" said Paul, ardently.

"Is this true? Have you really made up your mind to sacrifice your independence and ask me if I will consent to be your wife?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"Not if you say so. But you must admit that you have adopted a strange course. If you had been unlucky in gambling, you would have held yourself aloof; so I owe my happiness to the croupiers of Monaco. Such a revelation must be a humiliating one for me, unless it is intended as a test."

"A test!"

"Unless you wished to see if your change of fortune would influence me in my decision. You may be satisfied on that score. Had you said to me a week ago what you have said this evening, I should have replied: 'Yes, I am yours.'"

"And now?"

"Now I say the same; but on one condition."

"Name it."

"On condition that you won't keep this ill-gotten wealth."

"I won't keep the money if you desire me not to do so," said Paul, considerably crest-fallen. "But what shall I do with it? I can't return it to the Monaco people."

"I understand that," said Bertha, smiling; "but there are poor people."

"But a man cannot distribute four hundred thousand francs in hundred-sous pieces."

"Then don't give it to several poor people, but to one unfortunate and deserving poor person."

"There are so many of them. How am I to choose?"

"I will do that for you, if you will trust me."

Paul de Lizy was not at all prepared for such a proposal. He was so little prepared for it, in fact, that he really wondered if the countess was in earnest. However, he was not the man to recoil, for he loved her much more than he loved money, and to please her, he would have made an even greater sacrifice than that of his Monaco winnings. "You insist, then, upon being richer than I am?" he said, gaily.

"It is not that," replied the countess; "I have never troubled myself in the least about the amount of your fortune. I only know that it was inherited from your father, and that it was honestly acquired. I don't like the idea of your increasing it by winnings at the gambling-table, and so I condemn you to pay a heavy penalty."

"Very well, I submit. But to whom am I to give this money I had so much difficulty in wresting from the Monte-Carlo croupiers?"

"You are beginning to regret its loss already, I believe," said Madame de Marcenac, shaking her finger at him threateningly.

"Not exactly, though it is well worth regret, were it only as a souvenir of an unexpected victory. It is so seldom that a man wins at Monaco, and

I have left so much money there in years gone by ! But as such is your wish, I am ready to comply with it."

Bertha's eyes sparkled with joy. "I expected no less of you," she said, in a soft voice. "I shall always love you, and some one will for ever bless you."

"It is enough to know that you love me," replied Paul, gently. "I care little for the gratitude of a person I don't know."

"But whom you will know some day, my dear."

"But are you not afraid that such a gift would turn the head of the recipient?"

"Oh, not in the least."

"Then the person you mean to give the money to must be either a philosopher or a stoic."

"Nothing of the kind."

"You excite my curiosity. Pray tell me where this phenomenon dwells. I should like to see him or her without delay."

"The person in question would accept nothing from you."

"I am still more deeply mystified. Must I send the money to him in an anonymous letter?"

"Have you any confidence in me?"

"What a question !"

"Well, then, you must accept me as your almoner."

"Willingly," answered Paul, although rather surprised. "In fact, I should much prefer such an arrangement. But am I never to know to whom this handsome sum has been given?"

"Certainly you are," replied Madame de Marcenac, quickly. "I rely upon introducing you to the person who will owe so much happiness to you."

"But when?"

"By-and-by."

"That is rather indefinite."

"As soon as we are married."

"Why not now?"

"Because I have good reasons for deferring the presentation. I can tell you no more now. What I should like you to do is this: take the money to my business agent, and tell him to transform it into a draft, payable to my order. This draft is to remain in my cash box until I think proper to hand it to the person I have in mind. That day will soon come, I hope; and when it does you shall know everything."

"I will ask you no questions. You are to do exactly as you like. Your agent will receive the money to-morrow, and I shall not be altogether sorry to get rid of it, for I somehow fancy it would bring me bad luck. It caused me no little annoyance this morning. I was accused of having stolen it."

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. The police were looking for a man who had just committed an atrocious crime. They knew that he was in the same train as I returned to Paris by, and when I reached the station, they mistook me for him; and I was obliged to prove that the bank-notes and the bill of exchange I had about me were really my property. Fortunately this ridiculous adventure had no serious consequences, although it caused me to pass a very uncomfortable hour."

"Still another punishment for having gone to Monaco," exclaimed Madame de Marcenac, laughing. "I judge from what you say that a

murder must have been committed," she continued, changing her tone, "and on the railway line perhaps. When I think that the wretch who committed the crime might have attacked you——"

"No," interrupted Paul, "the crime was committed in one of the suburban towns. You will see the details in the papers. Let us say no more about it now. You have not given me an opportunity of telling you that you have made me the happiest of men, or of falling at your feet——"

"A man does not fall at the feet of the woman he is going to marry, but only at the feet of some obdurate beauty. Marriage is a very serious matter, by the way; and I fear you have not reflected sufficiently. I have, perhaps, gone too far."

"Not reflected sufficiently, when I have thought of nothing else for six months!"

"I, too, have thought of it for six months past, and I have had time to study your character. Are you quite sure that you have not yielded to an impulse of passion which you will regret by-and-by, when it is too late?"

"I swear to devote my life to you. I have a perfect horror of the existence I have led, and should renounce it for good, even if you refused to marry me. In that case, I should leave Paris, and go to the end of the world to try and forget you."

"I should be unwilling to reduce you to such an extremity. I would rather travel with you, only I warn you that we shall not go to Monaco when we are married."

Paul sprang up, and was about to throw himself at Bertha's feet, when she checked him by a gesture which plainly implied, "Some one is coming," and indeed some footsteps could be distinctly heard in the adjoining room. "Are you expecting any one?" Paul asked, in a low tone.

"No," replied the countess; "I had a presentiment you would call this afternoon, and I gave orders not to admit any one else."

The same footman who had ushered Paul into the room now appeared upon the threshold. "Who is there?" inquired Madame de Marcenac. "I gave orders to admit no one——"

"Excuse me, madame," replied the servant, very respectfully; "but a gentleman has called——"

"Why didn't you tell him that I was not at home?"

"I did, but he would not believe me, and insisted so strongly upon seeing madame that the doorkeeper could not get rid of him, and I finally consented to bring up his card."

Bertha stretched out her hand and took the card from off the silver salver which the footman was holding. She did this with the utmost indifference, but she had scarcely glanced at the name than her face changed. Paul de Lizy gazed at her in surprise, and saw that she had turned very pale.

"Tell the gentleman I only receive people I know," she said, at last, in a voice which trembled slightly in spite of her efforts to control it. The valet bowed respectfully. "And give him back his card," she added, tossing it on the salver with assumed indifference.

Paul, greatly astonished, was tempted for an instant to pick up the card, and read the name engraved upon it. His position towards Bertha would certainly have authorised him to take such a liberty, but he feared that he might hurt her feelings, and so he allowed the liveried messenger to depart. "Who was it?" he inquired, as soon as he was again alone with Bertha.



"Only a gentleman with whom I am not acquainted; one, indeed, that I had never heard of."

"That seems a trifle to disturb you so much."

"Why, I am not disturbed in the least."

"That is strange! I fancied——"

"What, are you jealous already?"

"By no means; only it seems strange that you should have sent this unknown visitor away in such an unceremonious manner. If I had been in your place, I should have wished to know what he had to say to me."

"He probably made a mistake in the house, or else he was a beggar. There is some one here almost every day for assistance or employment."

"I am sure you do not dismiss such applicants so peremptorily."

"Not when they state the object of their visit; but I show no mercy to those who pretend they have some important communication to make to me."

Paul made no reply this time, although he was not quite convinced, by any means.

"Why do you blame me?" Bertha asked, at last, half impatiently.

"Because I refused, for a stranger's sake, to interrupt a conversation which seemed to interest you? Really, I think it ill becomes you to complain. Do you imagine that this gentleman came to court me, and that I feigned ignorance of his name because I didn't care to bring you into the presence of a rival?"

"You wish me to be frank," replied Paul, reluctantly; "and I will be, for I can't bear that there should be the shadow of a cloud between us; so I declare that I should have paid no attention whatever to this incident, had you not certainly turned very pale when you glanced at the card."

"Did I really turn pale? Are you not mistaken? It often happens, though, that I do turn pale without any apparent cause. Have you not often noticed how nervous I am? The slightest embarrassment, even some trifling surprise, makes my cheeks flush or whiten."

Madame de Marcenac had now quite regained her self-possession, and she spoke in such a tone of sincerity that Paul exclaimed: "You are right, as you always are! I am a fool. If I did not love you so much, I should not be so suspicious. Pray forgive me."

"I forgive you the more readily as I am guilty of the same weakness myself. But there is something I wish to say to you. It is not unlikely that one of us may at some future day suspect the other. If I am the one, I pledge myself to ask you for an explanation immediately, and you must promise to do the same, if you distrust me. Uncertainty is the worst of all evils, and suspicion becomes incurable when it has once taken root. So I thank you for not concealing your thoughts just now. I was able to reassure you, while if you had gone away without revealing your true feelings we might have finally become completely estranged. It will be a lesson to us, will it not?"

"Yes, a lesson I shall never forget, I trust."

As Paul passed by the doorkeeper's room on leaving the house, that functionary, whom he had known for a long time, made some allusion to the visitor who had endeavoured to intrude upon his mistress a short time before, and he added: "I knew that madame wouldn't see him. As for myself, I am inclined to believe that he belongs to the detective service. He was a tall man, well enough dressed, but he could not even tell me the countess's name. He said he wished to speak to madame, and that was all; and when I said to him, 'Madame what?' he replied: 'Have my card

sent up to your mistress. When she sees it, she will receive me.' However, when Joseph brought him madame's answer, he went off growling like a dog."

"That's strange!" muttered Paul.

"It is very easy for you to see him, if you care to do so, Monsieur le Baron, for he is walking up and down the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street. He seems to be watching the house."

"Such behaviour can't be tolerated. Open the door for me. I will go and ask him what he is doing there. Did you see the name on his card?"

"No, I did not look at it; but Joseph, who took it in, may, perhaps, know what it was."

Paul hesitated, but only for an instant, and then, resisting the temptation, he said: "No, don't call him; I am in a hurry; besides, it's quite unnecessary. The man will probably tell me his name and what he wanted. If he is troublesome, I shall call a policeman."

On reaching the street, Paul perceived the man in question standing in a doorway, with his eyes persistently riveted upon Madame de Marcenac's house. Paul crossed the street as quickly as the long line of passing vehicles would allow him, and went straight towards the persevering spy with the intention of accosting him at once. When but a few steps off, he suddenly recognised him. "Sigoulès!" he exclaimed, advancing still nearer. "What! is it you? Where did you come from, and what are you doing here!"

"I am watching—playing the spy," replied the colonel, quietly. "Pray don't speak so loud; you will attract attention."

"But upon whom are you playing the spy!" asked Paul, lowering his voice a little. "I was just going to join you at the Café du Helder, and I find you on guard in the Faubourg Saint Honoré."

"I will explain, old fellow. Step up here beside me. You are not in a hurry, I suppose?"

"No; I will listen as long as you like. It is about some woman, of course."

"Certainly; if it were not, I assure you I shouldn't be standing here. After I left you in the Champs Elysées, I walked down the boulevard, smoking my cigar and looking in the shop-windows, when, in front of the Café Anglais, I noticed a row of cabs. As I glanced at them, my eyes fell upon number 1919—the same vehicle I had seen at the station on the night of my return from Fontainebleau. Lucky, wasn't it? I might have spent a couple of days in looking for the driver, and here I met him by chance the very first thing. As you may suppose, I lost no time in carrying out your suggestion, for you recollect it was you who devised this plan of discovering the fair stranger; so I approached the driver and offered him a napoleon to tell me where he took the lady who engaged him on the arrival of the last train from Fontainebleau on Saturday night. He had some difficulty in recalling the circumstance, but finally recollected that he had taken her to a house in the Faubourg Saint Honoré. He had forgotten the number, but felt sure he should know the house again, and offered to drive me there. I accepted his proposal, and he brought me to the mansion you see before you. What do you say now? Was I not right in declaring that my fellow-traveller was a real lady?"

Paul did not reply. Sigoulès's narrative had thrown him into a state of indescribable agitation. There was no longer any chance for doubt. The lady who had so charmed Sigoulès was Bertha de Marcenac. Paul now understood why she had turned pale upon reading the colonel's name on

the visiting-card, and why she had refused to see him. Paul also understood why Sigoulès had not hesitated to tell the truth. Sigoulès did not suspect that there were two entrances to the house, and that Lizy, whom he parted from in the Avenue Gabriel, had just left the very mansion into which he, Sigoulès, had vainly endeavoured to gain admission.

"The house is certainly very fine," Paul finally rejoined, with an air of affected carelessness; "but rich and fashionable ladies have their maids, remember, and your charmer was probably only a servant."

"Impossible!" growled the colonel, though he was a trifle shaken in his convictions.

"But you attempted to get in, you say! How did you proceed? It was rather a difficult matter, I should think, as you did not know the name of the person you wished to see."

"I was not stupid enough to ask it. I rang, and said to the door-keeper, with all the assurance imaginable: 'Is madame at home?' 'Madame la Comtesse is at home,' the Cerberus replied; 'but she is not receiving this evening.' So she was a countess! 'Have my card sent up; she will receive me,' I said, with unruffled composure. You will recollect that in the train I not only told the lady my name, but likewise informed her that I was a colonel of cavalry, and was staying at the Continental. So I said to myself: 'When she sees my name, she will certainly grant me five minutes' conversation, if only to beg me to keep her secret.'"

"Well, was your manœuvre successful?"

"No; unfortunately I was repulsed with heavy loss. A tall lackey brought me back my card, and told me his mistress refused to see me as she did not know me, so I was obliged to beat a retreat."

"What conclusions do you draw from your failure? That you are mistaken, after all?"

"No; I conclude that the lady had visitors, and that she did not wish to have an explanation with me in the presence of witnesses; so I did not insist."

Paul reflected for a moment, and then resolved to settle the matter once for all. "Then you persist in believing that this countess is your *inamorata*," he remarked. "Would you like to have your doubts set at rest without further delay? If so, I will introduce you to her."

"What! do you know her?"

"Very intimately. I just left the house."

"Impossible! You told me you were going to call on Madame de Marcenac."

"I just came from there."

"What! can it be Madame de Marcenac——"

"You are now standing in front of her house, to which there are two entrances. I was with her when your card was brought in. She did not show it to me, and I had not the slightest idea it was yours. However, as I came out, the porter mentioned you. He took you for a detective."

"I will cut his ears off!"

"You will do nothing of the kind. You think you met Madame de Marcenac travelling about *incog*. I should like to know if you are right."

"Didn't you tell me you thought of marrying her?"

"Oh! I only said that in jest. I am on the best of terms with her, but I haven't fully made up my mind to marry yet."

"But under what pretext will you present me to her?"

"In the first place, you are an old comrade; and besides, you were

formerly acquainted with the Count de Marcenac. It is only natural that you should call on his widow."

"I don't think so."

"No matter; come, or I shall think you are no longer my friend."

Retreat was impossible; so Sigoulès yielded to Paul de Lizy, who took him by the arm and led him across the street. The porter was astounded to see the supposed detective reappear accompanied by the Baron de Lizy; but as he did not dare to question Paul, he contented himself with ringing for the footman, who was equally surprised when he recognised the former intruder.

"Say to Madame de Marcenac that I have returned expressly to present one of my friends to her," said the baron.

The servant returned almost immediately to announce that madame would see the gentlemen. "She is not afraid; that is a good sign," thought Paul.

His heart throbbed fast with mingled fear and hope when he reached the door of the boudoir in company with Colonel Sigoulès.

Madame de Marcenac was awaiting them. She was standing in the centre of the room, directly under the chandelier, the light of which fell full upon her face, and when she saw them advance, her features merely expressed a feeling of surprise which was but natural under the circumstances. Sigoulès manifested some embarrassment, but that was all. "I am certain they have never met before," thought Paul de Lizy, who in his jealousy would have gladly given all his winnings at Monaco for the satisfaction of knowing that his suspicions were wholly without foundation.

"I scarcely hoped to see you again, my friend," said the countess, giving him an inquiring look.

"And I had no expectation of returning so soon," replied Paul, gaily. "My return is due solely to one of those fortunate chances that so seldom happen. But allow me first of all, my dear madame, to introduce to you my friend, Colonel Sigoulès."

Sigoulès bowed rather awkwardly, and stammered out something about the honour the countess was doing him, and the liberty he had taken, and which he hoped she would excuse.

"I shall always be glad to see any of your friends," said Bertha, turning to Paul; "and I regret that I did not sooner know that this gentleman was one of them. I could have spared him the trouble of returning. You were here just now when the colonel's card was brought in, but as I had never heard you speak of him, I had not the slightest suspicion of the truth."

"The reason you have never heard me speak of the colonel is due to the fact that he has been absent from France eleven years or more," interrupted Paul, with a radiant face. "But I must explain our rather unceremonious intrusion. On my way here, I met this friend whom I had not seen for a dozen years. We chatted awhile, and before leaving him, I told him where I was going. He informed me he had known the Count de Marcenac in former years, but I did not need to be apprised of this fact to feel at liberty to present to you an excellent comrade with whom I shared the hardships of a winter's campaign, and so I asked him to call at your house for me at six o'clock. We had arranged to dine together, and I felt sure you would pardon me for having made an appointment with him here without your permission. Was I wrong?"

"I not only forgive you, but thank you, my friend; but, if you had

warned me, you would have spared both the colonel and myself some annoyance. I am very grateful to you, sir, for bearing me no ill-will," she continued, turning to Sigoulès; "and I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you often. Do you reside in Paris?"

"I am sorry to say I do not, madame," replied the colonel. "I am only a bird of passage. My furlough will expire in a few months, and I shall be obliged to return to Tunis."

"But, during your furlough, pray believe that my house will always be open to you. Monsieur de Lizy is one of my most particular friends, and you will find him here almost every day." Sigoulès bowed his thanks. He was never much of a talker, and had firmly made up his mind to play the part of a silent spectator in this interview. He appeared so ill at ease, that the countess, who guessed what was passing in his mind, continued: "Only when it suits you to come, come a trifle earlier, my dear sir. I dine this evening at the house of a friend who lives a long way off, and I have scarcely time to dress."

Paul eagerly profited by this opportunity to take his leave. Although his suspicions were nearly dispelled, he was anxious to be alone with Sigoulès to ask him the decisive question. "My dear Bertha," he responded, "you remind me that we, too, have an engagement—a dinner with some officers at a restaurant—and we shall probably wind up the evening at the theatre or the club."

"Then I will detain you no longer; but I shall expect to see you again very soon," was Madame de Marcenac's reply.

This invitation seemed to be addressed especially to the colonel, and that gentleman bowed again, timidly pressed the lady's proffered hand, and left the room with Paul, whose face was radiant. "Well," asked the baron, as soon as they were in the street again.

"Well, you certainly are an admirable tactician," replied Sigoulès. "So much for being used to society; I should have committed a thousand blunders; but you improvised a plausible explanation without the slightest difficulty."

"Did you recognise your travelling companion in the Countess de Marcenac?"

"You would have perceived it if I had; and she would have shown some embarrassment. She must have thought me a simpleton."

"Why?"

"I did not open my lips. To tell the truth, I did not know what to say. I am not accustomed to the society of countesses, and I merely ventured into the presence of this one to gratify you."

"And you succeeded. The story of your railway adventure worried me not a little: and I feel like another man now I am sure that you were mistaken."

"Entirely mistaken."

"But how could that fool of a cabdriver have made such a blunder?"

"Possibly he was drunk when he drove the lady from the station, and so he is now unable to recollect where he took her; but in his anxiety to secure the louis I offered him, he brought me to the first house he came to."

"That must be it. How did you like Madame de Marcenac?"

"She is charming. In fact, she quite dazzled me."

"And when you come to know her better, you will find that she is as good as she is beautiful."

"Do you really think of marrying her?"

"I thought I told you as much before we parted in front of the garden gate. We shall be married in about a month's time. You asked me once to allow you to act as my best man. You shall."

The colonel said nothing. His face had suddenly lengthened; in fact, it wore the disturbed expression of a man who finds himself in a very uncomfortable position. "What is the matter?" inquired Paul.

"Nothing, I assure you."

"Oh, no subterfuges, pray! Don't you approve of the marriage?"

"I have no right to approve or disapprove."

"But what if I wish to consult you?"

"How can you expect me to reply? You have known Madame de Marcenac six months; I saw her this evening for the first time."

"Was it really for the first time?" inquired Paul, after a moment's silence.

"You must have seen that it was for the first time," replied Sigoulès. "Besides, where the deuce could I have met this lady? I have not set foot in France for eleven years. You question me as if you were a commissary of police, and about matters that don't concern me in the least."

"My dear Sigoulès," said Paul, very seriously, "when I told you that I expected to be married to Madame de Marcenac in a month, I read your disapproval of my resolution in your face; and although you have done your best to evade my questions, I believe that the lady with whom you travelled on returning from Fontainebleau was Madame de Marcenac."

"And even if she was, it does not follow that Madame de Marcenac is unworthy of respect. Travelling alone isn't a crime, or returning late either. Fontainebleau isn't a place of perdition. A person may have a host of good reasons for going there, and a lady is not bound to render an account of her every act."

Paul did not reply. He suddenly recollected his conversation with M. Chardin, and he wondered if Madame de Marcenac had not simply been returning from dinner with her father's old friend. "Besides," resumed Sigoulès, "you forget that the lady who was with me in the train conducted herself in an irreproachable manner. She put me down in the most summary fashion."

"But she did not succeed in discouraging you, as you have made every possible effort to find her; and so you did not take her for a virtuous woman. Listen, Sigoulès, you plead extenuating circumstances—but you will not succeed in convincing me. If it was Madame de Marcenac you met in the train, Madame de Marcenac is guilty, for if she were innocent she would not have played such a part in the farce I just witnessed. It would have been all the more easy for her to give a satisfactory explanation, from the fact that she has friends at Fontainebleau, as I am very well aware."

"There, didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed the colonel, thoughtlessly.

"That involuntary exclamation dispels my last doubts. You recognised her, and——"

"I assure you that you are mistaken, and I——"

"Give me your word of honour that it was not Madame de Marcenac who engaged cab No. 1919 at midnight at the terminus of the Lyons' line." Sigoulès averted his head, and made no reply. "You confess the truth at last," said Paul, coldly. "You ought to have done it in the first place. You have done me an immense service by enlightening me."

"I hope you are not going to break off your engagement with Madame

de Marcenac without an explanation. A man ought not to condemn a woman without a hearing," exclaimed Sigoulès.

"Knowing what you do, would you advise me to marry her?"

"I advise you to return to her house without delay, explain the situation clearly, and beg her to dispel your doubts. I am sure that a five minutes' conversation would suffice to re-assure you."

"What good would it do? She would only tell me more falsehoods; and I cannot forgive her for having deceived me before, and for pretending that she had never seen you. Everything is over between us."

"But I, too, deceived you."

"You had good reasons for acting as you did, and I don't blame you. But with her it was different—with her, who had just solemnly declared that she loved me—with her, who had almost urged me to appoint our wedding day! I deem her unworthy of the affection of an honourable man, and she no longer has any existence for me. She cannot deceive me with impunity. I made a great mistake, but you have saved me. Let us say no more about it, but go to dinner, colonel; I will try to find forgetfulness in the wine-cup."

The colonel consented, although with a rueful countenance, for he bitterly regretted that he had allowed a confession to be extorted from him. "I have an idea that the charming countess has done nothing wrong," he thought. "Why should I not call on her to-morrow, and tell her what has occurred? She can clear herself, I have no doubt of it, and I can then effect a reconciliation between her and Paul."

While Sigoulès was concocting these charitable plans, Paul was saying to himself: "No; I will never see her again. I curse and despise her! The deuce take this woman, her secrets, and the mysterious person she wished to enrich at my expense! The deuce take the usurer, Basfroi, and his assassin! I will remain a bachelor, and lead a life of reckless dissipation!"

### III.

AFTER the dinner, which proved to be excellent, and cheerful as well, the two friends strolled towards the opera-house, and they had just passed the Café Américain, when Lizy's eyes fell upon a cab, on the lanterns of which there figured the number 1919. Sigoulès had not noticed it, so he willingly submitted to the guidance of his friend, and approached the driver, who was pacing to and fro near the vehicle. This driver must have been blessed with an excellent memory for faces, for he instantly recognised the gentleman whom he had taken to the Faubourg Saint Honoré several hours before.

"So it is you, sir!" he exclaimed, before the colonel could motion him to be silent. "Shall I take you down there again?"

Paul took it upon himself to reply: "Ah!" he said, "you have plenty of assurance to impose upon my friend in the way you did, and to try to play the very same game again."

"What!" exclaimed the cabman, "impose upon a gentleman who paid me a napoleon for a five minutes' drive! Not I!"

"You rascal! the lady he was looking for does not live in the house you pointed out. So that is the way you swindle people out of gratuities."

"Was it necessary for me to take him into the lady's presence? I

showed him the door of the house where she lives, and I am sure I made no mistake, for I often take her home, and always at the same hour and from the same place."

"The terminus of the Lyons line, I suppose you mean?"

"Precisely. That Saturday night was the fourth time within a fortnight that I had driven the lady to the Faubourg Saint Honoré. It is a long distance, but she always gives me five francs for the fare. She knows me, and prefers me to the others because I drive fast."

Paul slipped ten francs into the man's hand in payment for this information; and he did not think it dear, for, to his mind, he had just acquired positive proof of Bertha's infidelity. "Well," he said to the colonel, when they had gone on a few steps, "will you still try to defend her? The countess goes to Fontainebleau twice a week, and always returns after midnight. Do you suppose she merely goes to walk in the forest?"

"I suppose nothing," said Sigoulès, sadly. "There is unquestionably some mystery in Madame de Marcenac's life—a mystery which it is no business of mine to unravel. But I can't understand why you don't have a plain talk with the lady, instead of questioning cabmen and the like. Believe me, my dear fellow, the direct road is not only the shortest, but the safest also."

"But I have told you that I shall give no further thought to this woman. On the contrary, I wish I were a thousand leagues from her, and if you would not be here with me for several months, I should immediately return to Monaco. But now I think of it, why don't you go there with me?"

"Because I should enjoy myself much better in Paris."

"Nor have I changed in that respect. It is not necessary to travel far to find an opportunity for gambling. I know twenty places where I can take you. It is necessary to be a member to play at my own club, but there are others near by where people are not so particular, and where I am sufficiently well known to take a friend. Come, let us try our luck."

"Agreed!" replied the colonel. "I will go wherever you like."

The club where Paul de Lizy proposed to take his friend was not one of the most select in Paris by any means, several persons who had been black-balled at other clubs having been admitted there; but, on the other hand, it was not one of those gambling dens to which any one can gain admission by the payment of five francs. A would-be member's name was duly proposed and seconded, and there was a committee to decide upon all applications for admission; but the committee acted very quickly, and were not particularly exacting. Paul and Sigoulès wended their way to the smoking-room, and found a fair number of members assembled there, and apparently conversing together. Paul, however, was about to pass on with the colonel to see what was doing in the way of gambling, when he heard some one pronounce a name which attracted his attention. It was that of M. Basfroi, and some one was reading an extract from an evening paper which seemed to interest the party greatly. Paul could not listen with indifference to a perusal so closely connected with his railway adventure, and so he paused. The assembled listeners were not particular friends of his by any means, but he was on sufficiently good terms with them; and the young fellow who was reading had frequently been his companion in joyous bouts. Alfred Dazance, as the young man was called, was a tall, well-built, and handsome fellow, who was met everywhere, even in the best society, although no one knew exactly who he was or what he lived upon. He not



only knew every one in Paris, but all that was going on there, and he was, indeed, so well informed that he might have added largely to his income by acting as a reporter; in fact, he was suspected of furnishing copy to society papers in his leisure moments.

"Come, my dear baron," he said, in a loud voice, on perceiving Paul, "come and hear about an affair which will plunge several club-men of our acquaintance into the depths of despair."

"What is it?" inquired Lizy, rather drily, for the amiable Alfred's familiarity always irritated him.

"Basfroi has been murdered," replied Dauzance.

"Basfroi!" repeated Paul, feigning ignorance.

"What!" cried Dauzance, "didn't you know Basfroi? But I forgot that you are rich. However, he was the licensed usurer of the club. There is scarcely a bold player among us who has not borrowed money of him at some time or other."

"And you say he has been murdered?"

"Yes; last night, at Fontainebleau, where he has lived in retirement ever since he gave up business. Listen to the account the paper gives of the affair: 'A frightful crime has just thrown the usually quiet town of Fontainebleau into a state of terrible excitement. Monsieur Basfroi, a retired merchant, who resided in a lonely house near the forest, was murdered last evening at about eleven o'clock. His safe, which contained a large amount of money and numerous securities, was stripped of its contents. The assassin was seen as he leaped from the window, but he succeeded in escaping his pursuers; and it is almost certain that he has taken refuge in Paris. The safe was not broken open, so it would seem that the culprit was no stranger to Monsieur Basfroi, but took advantage of a moment when they were transacting business to kill and rob him. The crime must, moreover, have been premeditated, for the assassin strangled his victim with a rope which he had brought with him. The police, who were at first thrown off the scent, are now on his track, and it is reasonable to hope that the murderer, who is not a professional criminal, will promptly be brought to justice.'"

Lizy was well aware that the police had at first been thrown off the scent, but he had no intention of talking about his interview with the commissary, and so he merely remarked, with an air of indifference: "Such things happen every day."

"Yes," replied Dauzance, "but it wouldn't be at all strange if the person who murdered Basfroi were one of his clients. I know at least a dozen members of this club who had given him notes of hand, and who would be only too glad to have them back again. Not that I would say that the assassin belonged to this club, but if what this paper states is true, several members may expect to be examined by the magistrates. Basfroi must certainly have kept books, and unless the man who killed him has destroyed them, the names of his debtors can probably be ascertained. I presume that the notes of these gentlemen have disappeared from the safe. Crimes are always committed by those who expect to profit by them. That is a well-known axiom of the law."

"Then I congratulate myself upon never having had any business transactions with this usurer."

"You have the more reason to congratulate yourself, as he lent money at thirty per cent., as our friend La Cadière is well aware. He at one time owed Basfroi fully one hundred thousand francs, which must have

amounted to a pretty sum when he settled up. However, he got out of the usurer's clutches as soon as luck changed in his favour; but I know others of whom I cannot say as much, and they may be put to some annoyance."

"You talk very strangely, Dauzance," said one of the gentlemen present. "To believe you, one might imagine that the entire club will be compromised by the murder of this old scoundrel. One of these days you will probably find that Basfroi was strangled and robbed by some ex-convict."

Paul did not share this opinion, feeling certain that he had travelled with the real assassin, who did not in the least look like an escaped convict. "Who is this La Cadière?" he carelessly asked, as if attaching little or no importance to the question.

"What, don't you know La Cadière?" exclaimed Dauzance. "Jean Gonfanon, owner of La Cadière and several other estates. He is a nobleman of Provence, he says; and I have no reason to doubt his word. He has travelled a great deal, and seems to have had a good many ups and downs in life, but he is just now the boldest player in the club."

"I have never met him."

"Probably because you have not been here for some time; besides he is often away from town. He had not shown himself for a week past, but he reappeared this evening, and has just announced that he will hold the bank and play against every one. It is a tempting opportunity for those who wish to retrieve their fortunes; but I fear he won't find many fellows disposed to avail themselves of it."

"Why? Is there any cause to suspect the manner in which he handles the cards?"

"No; he plays fairly, and I think he is an honourable man, but he has won so much money this winter that the majority of us are dead-broke, and the card-room is almost deserted. By the way, is something I heard the other day true?"

"What is that, pray?"

"That you went to Monaco to try your luck a week or more ago?"

"Quite true; I went there and I was not unsuccessful, so I shan't be sorry of an opportunity for having a bout with Monsieur de la Cadière; I am going to begin the attack without delay."

"It will be a well-matched game, and I am anxious to witness it. Are you not equally anxious, gentlemen? I don't know what we are loitering here for, when card-playing is going on down-stairs."

"That's so! Let us go at once!" exclaimed the idlers, who had been listening to the conversation.

"I will go on in advance to announce you, my dear baron," said Dauzance.

Paul stepped back to allow all the others to pass by, and then took a few steps on one side with the colonel, who remarked: "I hope you are not going to play heavily against a man of whom you know nothing whatever. From what I have just heard, I am inclined to think that this nobleman is only an adventurer."

"It is quite enough for me to know that he doesn't cheat," replied Paul, "and it is chiefly because he is a stranger to me that I want to play with him."

"You have singular ideas. I shun such people as I would the plague!"

"So do I, usually, but this evening I have my reasons for wishing to make the acquaintance of this person, whom I have never heard mentioned before."

The fact is, it had occurred to Paul that this so-called Provençal nobleman, who had borrowed such large sums from Basfroi, might be the traveller to whom he had so imprudently relinquished his ticket, and, in like manner, the assassin for whom the police were searching.

The card room was already full, and to see the eagerness with which the members present crowded round the table, no one would have supposed that a continuous run of ill luck had been their fate for several months past. The dealer of the cards was a young man, younger than Paul, and a trifle taller. His features were regular, and their expression pleasing. He had brown eyes and hair, and his complexion was very white. His face was clean shaven but for a slight moustache. He did not resemble the assassin in the least, although his white teeth reminded Paul of those his travelling companion had possessed; but then many men had similar ones. "I am sure, however, that I should recognise his voice," thought Lizy.

"Make your game," said M. de la Cadière, carelessly, at this same moment.

Lizy started. The voice was the same, but the so-called nobleman spoke with a southern accent which, although not strongly marked, was sufficiently so to be noticeable. "The fellow in the train did not speak with an accent like that," said Paul to himself. "Can a person conceal an accent? I think not."

Just then Sigoulès, who had succeeded in elbowing his way up to a place beside his friend, whispered: "It's strange, but I am sure I have seen that fellow's face somewhere before!"

"Try and recollect where," was Paul's eager reply.

"I am trying," replied Sigoulès, "but my memory plays me false. Still, I am sure this man is not a complete stranger to me. I don't think I ever met him in Tunis or Algeria——"

"Then it must have been in Paris, and your stay here has been so short——"

"I am equally sure that it was *not* in Paris."

"Then you must be mistaken. All fashionably-dressed men look alike, and there is nothing particularly striking about this man's appearance. You could easily mistake him for some one else. However, step up a little nearer, where he can see you, and see if he gives you any sign of recognition."

The colonel followed this advice, but although the Viscount de la Cadière soon perceived Sigoulès, he did not pause to examine him attentively, but repeated his old refrain: "Gentlemen, make your game." And then half-stifling a yawn, he added:

"I warn you that I have only cards enough for two more deals. Try to win my stakes, for I shall remove them if you gentlemen continue staking merely three or five louis."

Just then the colonel stepped back to Paul's side, and whispered: "I know now. I met the fellow in a street at Fontainebleau, and he stopped to ask me to give him a light for his cigar, rolling his 'r's' like a pure-blooded Marseillais. I was greatly surprised, as he had all the style of a native Parisian."

"When did you meet him?" inquired Lizy, eagerly.

"The day that I dined with the officers at Fontainebleau; the only time, indeed, I have been there since my return to France."

"Then it was the same day that you travelled to Paris with Madame de Marcenac?"

"Yes; but what of that?"

"Nothing, only you must admit that it is a strange coincidence."

A sudden commotion around the table partially drowned Paul's voice, and spared the colonel the necessity of replying. The game had ended, the banker was preparing to rise, and loud protests were heard on all sides from those who had hoped that evening to repair their losses of the past three months.

"If you were not so faint-hearted I wouldn't go," replied the viscount, coldly; "but you are not in earnest. I have no desire to spend the night in winning or losing a paltry two or three thousand francs."

"You are in funds, viscount, we all know that," said Alfred Dauzance, approaching the table. "You have had a fresh supply from Fontainebleau, I suppose?"

"From Fontainebleau?" asked La Cadière, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, from old Basfroi; but you won't see him again. I suppose you have heard that he has been murdered."

"I certainly read of it in this evening's paper; but I have not been to Fontainebleau for a couple of months or more."

"Oh! indeed. Well, no matter," rejoined Dauzance; "but, by the way, would you like a player to attack you in earnest?"

"Of course; I don't play for amusement; I play to win money," replied M. de la Cadière, cynically.

"I always suspected that. Well, don't go. There is some one here who is a match for you."

"Let him show himself, then," half sneered the viscount.

"Baron de Lizy, now is your time," cried Dauzance. "Monsieur de la Cadière's former victims entreat you to come to their aid."

Paul was furious at being thus called upon, but he was none the less firmly resolved to engage this individual who so strongly excited his curiosity. "I am ready, if one of these gentlemen will yield me his seat. I never like to play standing," was his quiet reply.

"Here is mine," cried one of the players, eagerly.

Paul took the proffered chair, and seated himself opposite the banker, who bowed without evincing the slightest astonishment on beholding his new opponent. The game lasted a long time, and when the pack of cards was exhausted Lizy had lost every one of the eighty bank notes of a thousand francs each which he had brought with him from Monaco. "Make your game, gentlemen," again cried M. de la Cadière, feeling sure that his adversary was about to retire from the field.

But Paul did not rise. "All that I have about me, monsieur," he said, "is a bill of exchange which I cannot divide. It is for three hundred thousand francs, payable at Rothchild's. I am willing to stake it."

La Cadière hesitated for an instant. He longed to continue playing, for he was full of confidence in himself; but the sum was so out of proportion with his means, as his acquaintances well knew, that he dared not accept the offer.

"I regret that I cannot oblige you," he replied, smiling graciously; "but really that is too much."

"Then will you allow me to bet once more with no other security than my word?"

"As often as you like. Your word is as good as your bond, Monsieur le Baron. I beg, however, that you will not name a sum that exceeds the amount I have before me."

"I will stake exactly a thousand louis. I have already lost eighty thousand francs. If luck is still against me, my losses will amount to the round sum of one hundred thousand francs, and then I shall stop.

Once more Paul lost. M. de la Cadière assumed a woe-begone expression as if ashamed of having won again. "Very well, monsieur," said Paul, as he rose from the table; "I owe you a thousand louis. The money shall be at your house before noon to-morrow. Will you give me your address?"

M. de la Cadière took an elegant card-case from his pocket, and said, in a grieved tone: "Here is my card, Monsieur le Baron; I sincerely regret having been so fortunate this evening, and I beg you to believe that you will always find me ready to give you your revenge."

Paul made no reply, and left the table without bowing to his triumphant opponent. He was immediately joined by Sigoulès, and the two friends withdrew to a corner of the room, where they could talk without danger of interruption. "Will you be kind enough to tell me why you have allowed yourself to be robbed of a hundred thousand francs by that fellow?" asked Sigoulès. "Your money must be a great burden to you, and not content with leaving it in his clutches, you must needs play upon your word of honour, and now you will be obliged to pay him a visit to-morrow."

"That is precisely what I was after. I have his address now."

"It cost you dear, I must say. You could have obtained it from the club steward. Besides, what do you want with it? Do you propose to pick a quarrel with him?"

"Not exactly; but I have to ask him for an explanation."

"Respecting what? Didn't you meet him this evening for the first time?"

"Perhaps so; but you met him at Fontainebleau."

"And you still entertain those absurd suspicions?"

"Absurd or not, I am going to have them settled one way or the other."

"I hope you are not going to mention the Countess de Marcenao's name to this man."

"No; I shall speak to him about an entirely different matter—about an adventure which you know nothing of, and which I cannot relate to you here. But look, the viscount has left the table, and is coming towards us. I am anxious to know what he can have to say to me. Let us wait a moment."

Paul was right. M. de la Cadière approached them with a smile upon his lips, and said, after bowing courteously to both gentlemen: "May I venture, Monsieur le Baron, to ask for the favour of a moment's conversation with you?"

"Speak, sir," was Paul's dry response.

"I should prefer to speak to you in private," rejoined the viscount. "I trust this gentleman will excuse my request," he added, bowing to the colonel. "I will not detain you long."

"This gentleman is a particular friend and may hear all you have to say to me. But I can guess the subject upon which you wish to speak. I myself intended to see you to-morrow about the same matter."

"Then I see no reason why we should defer our conversation. Besides, when you made your last wager, I somehow fancied that you risked the sum chiefly for the sake of being able to bring it to me yourself in case you lost. Was I not right?"

"Possibly. But how did such an idea occur to you?"

"It was caused by certain remarks made in your presence."

"Will you please explain yourself more clearly?" said Paul, although he perfectly understood that the remarks to which M. de la Cadière referred must be those of Alfred Dauzance. "While we were playing, my attention was wholly absorbed by the game, and I paid little or no attention to what was being said around me."

"Not even to what Monsieur Dauzance said?"

"He spoke, I think, of the death of a usurer of whom he pretended you had borrowed some money. I am not surprised if you were offended by his remarks, but it is your place to tell him so, not mine."

"I should have told him so if I had not known his character. No one took what he said seriously, and so I paid no attention to his insinuations."

"What insinuations?" asked Paul.

"You cannot have failed to remark the persistency with which he reminded me that I had occasionally visited Fontainebleau, and the malevolence concealed under his nonsense."

"Do you fancy he meant to accuse you of having assassinated your creditor? It is an idea which would never have occurred to me if you yourself had not suggested it."

"Yes, I do," replied the viscount. "Dauzance is capable of anything, even of making the most abominable charges against an honest man, merely for the pleasure of amusing those around him. His insinuations may lead to my being summoned before an investigating magistrate. If the account of the murder given by the newspapers, from which I have learned all that I know about the affair, is correct, all who owe, or have owed, Basfroi any money, will be examined. I have visited Fontainebleau occasionally."

"I met you at Fontainebleau a week or more ago," said Sigoulès. "I even gave you a light to your cigar."

"I recollect that very well, sir," replied M. de la Cadière, "and you must have been very shocked a few moments ago to hear me tell Dauzance that I had not set foot in Fontainebleau for a couple of months. I have not the honour of your acquaintance, sir, but I see very plainly that you are a soldier; so I prize your esteem as highly as that of Monsieur de Lizy."

"Excuse me, sir," said Paul, promptly, "but you are talking about matters which do not concern us in the least, and you appear to regard us as the self-appointed judges of your actions. You must have had some motive in addressing us, and yet you do not come to the point."

"Because I must speak to you in private."

"It is quite evident that I am *de trop*," exclaimed the colonel, making for the door.

"Will you be kind enough to step into the adjoining room, baron?" now asked La Cadière. "There are too many people here for us to be able to talk quietly; besides, I see Dauzance looking at us, and he would be impolite enough to interrupt us."

Lizy silently followed his companion into the smoking-room, which happened to be deserted. "Now, what have you to say to me?" he asked, looking La Cadière full in the face.

The viscount seemed to be in no hurry to reply; but the silence at last became embarrassing, and he broke it with this unexpected question: "Is it possible, sir, that you don't recognise me?"

Lizy started; but the more frank his companion pretended to be, the more reserved he, Paul, became. "When I first entered the card-room," he slowly replied, "it did seem to me that I had seen you somewhere before."

"Well, I will set your doubts at rest. You last night rendered me a service which I shall never forget as long as I live."

"Then it was you who secretly boarded the train without a ticket, and purchased mine?"

"Why should I not admit it to you, who extricated me from the greatest dilemma in which I ever found myself? I am so grateful to you that I could not neglect an opportunity of expressing my gratitude."

"I half recognised you; but you have such a talent for disguising your person and even your voice that I was in doubt."

"You refer, I suppose, to my accent. I contracted it during a prolonged sojourn in Marseilles, but at times I unconsciously lose it, for instance when I am excited, as I was last night."

"I should imagine you would be so still, if you had read the evening papers."

"Which mention the murder of a man from whom I once borrowed some money! No, I am not excited; but I feel some anxiety. Dauzance's ill-timed jests have shown me the gravity of my situation. One of those strange chances so common in life made it necessary for me to conceal myself at the very moment when a crime was committed in the same neighbourhood, and that crime, the murder of a usurer to whom I had been long indebted. I need not assure you that I had nothing to do with it. Men of my rank don't commit murder, especially in order to steal; but it is nevertheless true that I should be exposed to serious annoyance if what passed between us in the railway-carriage became known."

"I should think so," replied Paul, coldly, "at least, judging from my own experience."

"What! is it possible that you had any trouble on account of the loss of your ticket?"

"I but narrowly escaped being sent to prison. The police were on the watch, and there was a commissary of police at the station, awaiting the arrival of the assassin, for it was known that he was in the train. I was taken before the commissary, and I only succeeded in clearing myself by relating my adventure in detail."

"Then he knows about the ticket you so kindly gave me?"

"Yes; and the romantic story you invented to explain your strange conduct. But he did not believe a single word of it."

"It was true, all the same, and I don't see how he could doubt it if you told him I entered your compartment at Melun. The crime was committed at Fontainebleau."

"Yes; but the assassin was tracked to Melun, where he was seen climbing the fence that encloses the line, only a few hundred yards from the station. The description of his person corresponds exactly with the description I gave of you; and an overcoat, which he threw away in his flight, was picked up by his pursuers."

"So much the better. I am sure they will not find my tailor's name upon it."

"Nor is this all," continued Paul; "you gave me a louis and a fifty-franc note in payment for the ticket. When I handed the commissary this note, he called my attention to the fact that it was stained with blood."

"I told you, did I not, that I hurt my hand in leaping out of a window? But this is another of those pieces of circumstantial evidence which have brought so many innocent men to the gallows."

"And now, sir," sharply said Paul, amazed by so much assurance,

"what do you think would happen if I went to the prefect of police and gave him the name and address of my travelling companion?"

"I think the result would be untold annoyance for me," replied M. de la Cadière. "I should have no difficulty in clearing myself, however; but other persons, some of them acquaintances of yours, might be compromised, and seriously compromised too."

"I do not understand," exclaimed Paul, in dismay.

"Well, sir, to prove that I murdered Monsieur Basfroi, it will be necessary to establish the fact that I stole the money from his safe, or that I killed him to regain possession of certain notes signed by me. Now, I am able to explain the source of all the money I have on hand. Twenty members of this club, yourself included, will testify, if need be, that I have won at the card-table all I possess at the present moment. As for the promissory notes I gave Basfroi, I gave the last one about two months ago, as I intimated in reply to the insinuations of Dauzance; but a week ago, on Saturday, the very day when your friend, the colonel, met me in the streets of Fontainebleau, at about six o'clock in the evening, I had just settled my account with the usurer."

"I doubt if your word will be considered sufficient proof of that."

"But I have a witness. On my arrival at Basfroi's house, I found there a person who was undoubtedly acquainted with his business transactions, for she was present at our interview, saw me pay him twelve thousand francs, and heard him say to me: 'Now we are square again; but you will always find me at your service when you need me, for I wish that all my clients were as prompt as you are.'"

"It would be advisable for you to summon this witness, especially if she is a person whose word can be relied upon."

"The only reason I have refrained from mentioning this witness before, was my unwillingness to annoy you by bringing any friend of yours into the affair. I have told you my principles. A woman is sacred in my eyes, and only as a last resort would I say aught to injure her reputation; but if I were ordered to reveal her name under present circumstances, I should have to do so under penalty of being considered a liar and possibly a murderer. You, however, are not a magistrate, and there is no reason why I should not tell you all. I owe it to you, in fact, as a small return for the very great service you rendered me. Well, sir, the lady whom I met at this money-lender's house, and who seemed to be on very intimate terms with him, was none other than the Countess de Marcenac."

Paul turned pale, although he was not altogether unprepared for the blow. "You know her, then?" he inquired.

"By sight, yes. Indeed, who does not know Madame de Marcenac, one of the most elegant and fashionable ladies in Paris? I have been aware for some time that you are intimately acquainted with her. It would therefore perhaps be as well for you to warn her that she may perhaps be summoned as a witness in the investigation of this unfortunate affair. It would be right, I think, for her to know this, and if you deem it proper to speak to her on the subject, she will undoubtedly recollect my interview with Monsieur Basfroi, while she was in his office."

"You seem to think that Madame de Marcenac will find it difficult to explain her visit to Monsieur Basfroi," said Paul, coldly. "But you are very much mistaken. Monsieur Basfroi was the friend, and, indeed, at one time, the partner of her father, and on the day you met her at his house she dined and spent the evening there."



"Did she tell you so?" asked M. de la Cadière, quickly.

"I know it. Why do you seem to doubt my assertion?"

"I do not doubt it, if you are sure of it; only I must say that a quarter of an hour after I left Monsieur Basfroi's house, as I was returning along the road to the station, I met her in the town. I did not venture to follow her, but I did see her take an avenue called the Rue des Sorbiers, leading to the forest, and enter a small lonely cottage of which she apparently had the key. However, she may have returned to the house of her father's old friend afterwards. I have no right whatever to criticise her actions, and I only allude to this trifling incident because I am anxious you should view the situation as it really is."

"In other words, you threaten to defame Madame de Marcenac, if I denounce you," said Paul, angrily.

"You misunderstand me," replied La Cadière, rising as he spoke, "I have not the slightest objection to your denouncing me. I use the expression because you employ it, but it is not the proper term to use in this case, for one cannot denounce a man who is not trying to conceal anything. You are at liberty to give my name and address to the prefect of police; I will take the consequences, but I shall not be the only sufferer. I must now take leave of you, and I cannot do so without expressing the sincere regret I feel for having won so much money from you this evening."

"You will receive the amount I owe you to-morrow morning," was Paul's rough reply, as he unceremoniously turned his back on the viscount, and walked away, frantic with rage at the thinly-disguised accusations just made against the countess. In the hall he met Sigoulès, who was beginning to grow impatient.

"Well, here you are at last!" exclaimed the colonel. "What could that fellow have to say to detain you so long?"

"He told me that the lady whose cause you have so warmly espoused was returning from a meeting with her lover when you travelled with her on the railway line."

"What!" exclaimed the colonel, "that scoundrel dared to slander the Countess de Marcenac, and you did not pull his ears?"

"I cannot fight with a man who is perhaps a murderer."

"What! was it he who murdered the usurer? Has he confessed his guilt?"

"No; he denies it; but he is afraid of being accused. Come outside, and I will tell you something that will astonish you."

But even after Paul had related his railway adventure, and his recent conversation with M. de la Cadière, mentioning the viscount's threat of compromising Madame de Marcenac, if he were troubled by the authorities, Sigoulès refused to be convinced. He declined to believe that the countess had anything to conceal.

"The fellow lies!" exclaimed the colonel. "He assassinated and robbed Basfroi. He is trying to intimidate you in order to prevent you from denouncing him."

"You forget that it was not necessary for him to come to me and say: 'It was to me that you gave your ticket.' I had not recognised him, and no one else would have recognised him, for he wore a false beard and blue spectacles in the train."

"All that may be true, but he saw that you were examining him very closely, and opined that you would arrive at the truth sooner or later; so, being alarmed, he answered in advance the very questions you intended to

put to him. It was the height of shrewdness, and proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that the scamp has prepared his plan of defence. I hope you will not allow yourself to be taken in by this manœuvre."

"Then you advise me to denounce him, at the risk of exposing Madame de Marcenac to the humiliation of being called to account for her disgraceful actions?"

"I am certain she has no reason to shirk any investigation."

"And I am equally certain that if I did consult her, she would beg me to be silent. But I will never see her again. Upon that I am fully resolved."

"You are blinded by anger now, but when this paroxysm of passion is over you will regret your hasty decision, for what proofs have you against this charming woman, whom a scoundrel has basely slandered so as to save himself from the gallows?"

"Take care; I shall come to the conclusion that you are in love with her yourself," said Paul, ironically.

"Even if I were, it would not be of the slightest use, for she loves you," replied the colonel, quietly. "I saw it in her eyes. But, seriously, will you allow me to do what you are unwilling to do? Will you allow me to tell her all I know about this matter?"

"I have not the slightest objection."

"And will you allow me to repeat to you what she says in reply?"

"I should be greatly obliged to you if you would never mention her name to me again."

"Very well; I will not do so until I am in a position to make you admit that you have accused her falsely."

"So you are going to undertake her vindication! Well, good luck to you, old fellow!"

"What! are you going to leave me?"

"Yes; you don't seem inclined to finish the night in a very jubilant manner; and I have no desire to go to bed yet, so I can only bid you good-bye. Come and breakfast with me—one of these days—when you have brought your difficult campaign to a successful termination." With these words Paul shook hands with the colonel, and walked rapidly away.

"He is offended with me," muttered Sigoulès, overcome with consternation by this abrupt departure, "and only because I have tried to prevent him from committing an act of folly. Appearances are certainly against the poor woman, but something tells me that she is innocent—and I will prove it!"

#### IV.

PAUL proceeded slowly towards the Place de la Madeleine, for he had no idea of spending the night in dissipation, although he had so assured Sigoulès for the sake of getting rid of him. He was simply returning home, miserable beyond expression, for it was his wounded pride which had impelled him to feign indifference. He was suffering terribly, for he realised too late that he loved Bertha much more ardently than he had supposed. He was so deeply absorbed in his reflections that he passed the Place de la Madeleine where he lived, without being aware of it, and mechanically turned into the Rue Royale. It was not until he had reached the Place de la Concorde that he discovered his mistake. The Avenue

Gabriel was only a few steps distant, and the lover-like idea of going to gaze at Madame de Marcenac's windows occurred to him. The Champs Elysées were nearly deserted, and Paul was not afraid of having his dreams disturbed. He finally paused almost opposite the house, on the very spot where he had taken leave of the colonel before his visit to the countess. As he was familiar with the arrangements of the mansion, he saw at once that the only windows lighted up were those of Bertha's bedroom. Suddenly a shadowy form emerged from the luminous background and approached one of the windows. "It is she!" murmured Paul; but a moment later, a second figure could be seen at the window beside that of Bertha. "Her maid," thought the young fellow. "But no, the maid is not so tall as Bertha, whereas the woman I see is much taller. Bertha is talking to her with great animation. She is gesticulating eagerly, and seems to be telling her the way to go."

Both forms retreated almost as suddenly as they had appeared, and then Madame de Marcenac returning to the window, pressed her face against the pane. Paul had a presentiment that he was about to fathom the mystery which surrounded the countess, and his heart throbbed wildly. A few minutes later he heard footsteps in the garden, and then the gate opened softly, a woman came out, closed the gate behind her, and paused for an instant on the pavement.

He had time to examine her attentively, for she looked around as if to satisfy herself that no one was observing her. She also seemed in doubt as to the direction she should take. She was too far from Paul to see him, as he was partially concealed by the trunk of a large tree, and he, for the same reason, was unable to distinguish her features; but he could see that she was young, gracefully, even elegantly formed, and not attired in the humble garb of a waiting-maid or seamstress.

In her hand she held something which she finally placed in her jacket pocket. "A letter," muttered Paul, "yes, it is a letter. She just glanced at the address, and she is now going to take it to—to whom? I will find out, even if I have to wrest that letter from her by force."

Keeping close in the shadow of the houses, the strange woman at last proceeded towards the Place de la Concorde; and on reaching the corner of the Imperial Club-house she hastily turned to the left and disappeared down the Rue Boissy d'Anglas.

Paul quickened his pace and soon overtook her. "She has received orders to choose the least frequented streets," he thought, "she must have been entrusted with a very important commission—a secret one, too."

The messenger walked on rapidly and without turning or looking back; she evidently did not suspect that she was followed. In front of the Madeleine, however, she again paused, and looked around her. "What can she be looking for?" Paul said to himself. "A cab, perhaps. Zounds! I shall find myself in a nice predicament if she takes a vehicle."

But he soon saw that the stranger had another purpose, for on catching sight of two policemen in the distance, she went straight towards them. Paul guessed that she desired to obtain some information from them, and resolved to take advantage of the opportunity to secure a clue; so he turned up his coat-collar, buried his hands in his pockets, and with the rapid tread of a man who is trying to warm himself by exercise he directed his course so as to pass within a few paces of the two policemen and the woman who was consulting them.

His manœuvre was successful, for as he passed he overheard these words:

"The Rue Norvins? That is at Montmartre, almost opposite Saint Peter's Church."

"And which is the shortest way to reach it, pray?"

"The shortest way is pretty long, young lady. You must go up the Rue du Hâvre as far as the railway station, then follow the Rue Saint Lazare as far as the Place——"

Paul walked on, slackening his pace a little; but when he had gone some fifty yards he seated himself upon a bench to let the stranger pass him. He now knew where she was going, and he resolved not to lose sight of her until she reached her destination. The Rue Norvins was an obscure street, in a neighbourhood where none of Madame de Marcenac's fashionable acquaintances would be likely to reside. So the mystery deepened; but Paul felt sure that he should succeed in fathoming it. On leaving the policemen, the young woman walked in the direction of the Rue Tronchet, passing the bench upon which Paul was seated, but without paying any attention to him. He, however, managed to catch a glimpse of her face, and his suspicions that she was young and pretty were confirmed. He determined to follow her without attracting her attention, and take the number of the house she entered.

All went well at first; but when the messenger turned into the Rue Blanche, the chase became more difficult. After midnight, this hilly street is but little frequented; and as the young woman slowly climbed the steep ascent the ring of Paul's heels upon the pavement finally attracted her attention, and she turned round and saw him following her. Had he quietly proceeded on his way, all might have gone well, but, taken by surprise, he stopped and took refuge under a doorway. The stranger walked on, but Paul's manœuvre had not escaped her notice, and she probably guessed his object, for she now scarcely took a dozen steps without glancing behind her, and at the corner of the Rue Labruyère she suddenly turned and stopped short. It might have been supposed that she was waiting for him.

The moment for taking a decisive step had come. So Paul advanced resolutely, and saw that the stranger did not stir.

She had paused under a street-lamp, and she did not lower her veil, which proved that she had no desire to conceal herself, but wished to know with whom she had to deal.

"You seem to be following me," she said, when Paul paused in front of her. "Why are you doing that?"

Her calm, collected tone greatly surprised Paul de Lizy. He had expected to encounter a frightened or angry woman, and this girl spoke to him as quietly as if she were asking him the most common-place question in a drawing-room. At the same time, he looked at her and saw that she was really charming, with luxurious brown hair, a snowy skin, large brilliant eyes and scarlet lips—in short, a beauty of the southern type, but with all the grace and intelligence of a Parisienne. Paul was so surprised by this discovery that he quite forgot to reply. "Well, sir," she resumed, "I am waiting for your answer. What is your business with me?"

Paul bowed to her as deferentially as he would have bowed to Madame de Marcenac, had he met her in the street, and said with unfeigned embarrassment: "Excuse me, madame, and pray believe that I have not the evil designs which I fear you impute to me. Although I have ventured to follow you, it was only to protect you. It is late, and this neighbourhood is not a very safe one. I wished to be near enough to come to

your aid, if necessary; but I have always kept at a respectful distance. I trusted that you would not notice me, and I have now only approached you because I thought you desired to speak to me."

"Yes; to assure you that I do not need a body-guard," replied the girl, for she looked scarcely twenty years of age.

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle. Allow me to address you as mademoiselle. Your age authorises it."

"Call me what you like, but please abandon an unnecessary and annoying pursuit."

"I will attend you in such a way that you will feel no further annoyance. I will remain some distance behind you, and you shan't even know that I am there; but I cannot allow you to walk through such deserted streets alone, at one o'clock in the morning. You don't know the risk you run. There are always a number of roughs round about the Place Pigalle, where you are going."

"But I am not going to the Place Pigalle."

"No matter. The whole neighbourhood is very unsafe, and if you go beyond the point you speak of, it will be still worse. So allow me to continue to act as your escort—at a distance. I give you my word of honour that I will go off as soon as I have seen you in a place of safety—that is to say, as soon as I have seen you enter a house."

"I am extremely obliged for your solicitude; but you will not convince me that your offers of service are altogether disinterested. Confess that if I were old and ugly you would not be so anxious to protect me."

"If you were old and ugly you would have no cause for fear."

"That is true, perhaps; but be frank enough to acknowledge that you are merely following me for the sake of an adventure. I don't reproach you, and even admit that you could hardly fail to be mistaken respecting me. A woman who goes about the streets alone at such an hour as this must be prepared for such annoyances. But I am not afraid, and I have the means of defending myself. It was in order to have an explanation that I waited for you. You now see what I am, and I see that you are a well-bred man, so retrace your steps, and allow me to proceed on my way."

"Retrace my steps? and why? My homeward way is the same as yours."

"How do you know?" was the prompt rejoinder.

"Why, it isn't hard to see that you are going to Montmartre, and as I am going there also——"

"You intend to accompany me to my own door. Ah! well, since you compel me to say it, I forbid your doing so; and if you persist in playing the part of a detective in spite of my protests, I shall defeat you by taking the first cab that passes."

"A very poor way, mademoiselle; for, if I wish to learn where you live, I shall only have to note the number of the cab you take, and tomorrow I can easily ascertain where it conveyed you."

This answer seemed to make an impression upon the girl, for she did not reply, but gave Paul a searching look. He divined that she was asking herself if it would not be advisable to change her system of defence. He was right; for, after a pause, she exclaimed smilingly: "It is evidently useless to contend with you, sir. Your obstinacy must eventually overcome all obstacles, so I prefer to yield gracefully. Follow me, then, as I am unable to prevent it, or rather accompany me. I should prefer seeing you beside me to hearing the annoying sound of your footsteps behind me again."

"Thanks, mademoiselle," replied Paul, warmly. "You shall never repent of having granted me your confidence."

"Oh, my confidence in you is very limited. I accept your company, but only on certain conditions. You are to pay me no compliments and ask me no impertinent questions."

"I am your defender, mademoiselle," replied Paul gaily; "your defender and nothing more—and only for the time being, as you will dismiss me at the end of your journey."

"But my journey will not be a very long one, and your dismissal may come sooner than you think. Make up your mind to being sent away as soon as it may suit my convenience."

"Without giving me any hope of seeing you again?"

"Seeing me again! What would be the use of that? You don't know who I am, and I don't know who you are. We had better allow this state of things to remain unchanged."

"Is this a hint for me to tell her my name?" thought Paul. "I should very much like to know hers. Where the devil did Bertha find this emissary who executes her commissions so faithfully? Not in her own set, certainly. A well-born young girl would never have ventured out at this hour unattended, and yet her manners and language are refined and even elegant."

As Paul indulged in these reflections, he glanced furtively at the face and figure of his pretty companion. Suddenly his eyes fell on her jacket pocket, and in this pocket, which gaped a trifle, he espied the letter she had placed there on leaving Madame de Marcenac's house. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Paul could refrain from seizing this accursed letter which lay there within his reach. He had merely to stretch out his hand to take it, and Bertha's messenger would certainly not have perceived its loss, so absorbed was she in trying to devise some scheme that would relieve her of her self-appointed protector.

"Is not that the Place Pigalle I see ahead of us?" she inquired, as they approached the corner of the Rue de Douai.

"Yes, mademoiselle," replied Paul, promptly; "I see that you are not familiar with the neighbourhood, and I don't understand how you could have hoped to find your way to Montmartre without my assistance. You would never have succeeded, I am sure."

"Who told you I was going there?" retorted the girl, pausing abruptly; and she added, with a suspicious air: "Tell me the truth. How long have you been following me?"

Paul regretted having said so much, but this was perhaps an opportune moment to extort a confession from the stranger. "Will you be angry if I confess that I have followed you from the Place de la Madeleine?" he said, in reply. "I was passing just as you asked the policemen to direct you, and I heard one of them say: 'It is a long way to Montmartre.'"

"And was that all you heard?"

"That was quite enough to induce me to follow you. Seeing a young woman about to undertake a midnight pilgrimage which would frighten many men, I thought it would be a commendable act on my part to constitute myself her protector. And now that I have made this confession, can you still doubt the purity of my motives?"

"I will try not to," replied the girl, laughing. "I am really grateful to you for not having treated me as if I were an adventuress. You shall

accompany me across this Place Pigalle, of which you have drawn such a frightful picture, and then—we will separate."

Paul concluded that it was best to accept this offer, for every step brought him nearer to the goal, and he hoped, by his submission, to effect another arrangement later on. "I consent; come, mademoiselle," he said, offering her his arm, which she frankly accepted.

The Place Pigalle is not by any means a disreputable neighbourhood in the day-time. The houses are mostly occupied by artists; some of the buildings are very handsome, and a fountain, surrounded by well-kept turf, adorns the centre—but at night-time the spot is frequented by a crowd of noisy and turbulent characters of both sexes, who dance and fight to the great annoyance of peaceable citizens. As Lizy and the strange girl passed along they saw some suspicious-looking fellows gathered around the fountain, and occasionally met some flashily-dressed women and heard the mocking laughs and exclamations with which they were greeted. Paul felt his companion's hand tremble upon his arm, and he said to himself: "She is afraid. There is little doubt but what she will decide to remain under my protection." At a short distance beyond the square, however, the girl paused and dropped her companion's arm. "Was I wrong to insist upon accompanying you?" inquired Paul.

"No," she replied, "I confess that I was rather alarmed just now, and I thank you for your protection; but now that all danger is over, I must remind you of our agreement. It is now time for us to part."

"So you think all danger is past? It has only just begun. Those loungers over there noticed us, and are still watching us. They kept quiet because I was with you, but if they saw me go off they would certainly run after you. Not a week passes but some crime is committed in this neighbourhood; and I should fail in my duty as an honourable man if I left you unprotected. Under any other circumstances, I would yield to your wishes, but on this point, I am firmly resolved to disobey you."

"Ah, well," said the girl, "remain with me then until we are out of those men's sight, and leave me when you think there is no longer any danger."

"Willingly, mademoiselle," replied Paul, promptly. "You are going, I believe, to the summit of the hill, and the streets that lead there are no safer than our present surroundings; however, I shall be with you. Which street shall we take?"

The girl hung her head as she rather despondently replied: "I don't know."

"Is this, then, the first time you have ever visited Montmartre?"

"No; but I always came in a vehicle, and I did not notice the streets we took. I thought I could obtain all necessary information on my way, and——"

"And you questioned some of the police who could only give you vague directions as to the course you were to pursue. What a sorry plight you would be in if you were alone, and compelled to make inquiries of one of those rascals who are still watching us. Ah, mademoiselle, I don't ask to know your secrets, but the people who sent you through the streets of Paris at such an hour can have very little regard for you."

"I did not tell you that I was sent by any one."

"No; but I am certain that such is the case. You do not reside in the house to which you are going, for you do not even know where it is. Oh, I do not seek to know anything; I shall content myself with assuring you that if I can be of any service in the matter, I am entirely at your disposal."

"I am very grateful to you sir, but in what I have to do I must be unaided."

"But, mademoiselle, although I have no right to meddle with your affairs, I know you are the bearer of a letter, for I can see it in your pocket. Heaven knows I don't wish you to show it to me, or to tell me for whom it is intended. It isn't the letter that interests me, but yourself; and I assure you that you would not reach the Rue Norvins, which must be in a very unfrequented neighbourhood."

"The Rue Norvins! How do you know I am going there?"

"I overheard your conversation with the policeman."

"You told me you overheard only a few words." As she spoke, the girl took the letter from her pocket and looked at it as if wondering how she should dispose of it; then, still holding it in her slender fingers, she glanced at the closed shops which they were walking past. Suddenly, however, she turned to Paul, and said carelessly: "Do you really think the ascent of the hill so perilous?"

"If you attempt it alone, yes, mademoiselle; but with me——"

"I don't wish to expose you to danger merely for the sake of protecting me. I would rather renounce a project, the danger of which you have just explained to me." And then, before Paul suspected her intention, she hastily turned towards a tobacco-shop beside her, and slipped the mysterious letter through a narrow slit above which ran the words: "Letter-box."

There was nothing extraordinary about this finish of the affair, and Paul might have foreseen it; but he had failed to do so, and he now stood overcome with consternation as he saw the missive which contained Madame de Marcenac's secret disappear in the Government receptacle for letters. He had hoped to see the house where the letter was to be left, and just as he thought he had reached the goal, the girl suddenly abandoned her expedition and confided the important, urgent commission—which she had originally intended to execute in person—to the post office authorities. She had evidently mistrusted her protector, and Paul gazed almost piteously at the letter-box which had frustrated all his plans. The girl, however, smiled, and surveyed him with a slightly mocking air. One might have supposed that she was enjoying his discomfiture, and that she was delighted at being relieved of a responsibility which weighed heavily upon her. "What is the matter, sir?" she asked. "Are you angry with me because I have got rid of that troublesome letter? I thought it did not interest you."

"Oh, not in the least!" stammered Paul de Lizy.

"I ought to have thought of this plan of disposing of it, sooner. I might have saved myself a dangerous walk, and you considerable trouble. The letter will reach its destination to-morrow morning, and that will answer every purpose."

"I thought you were anxious to deliver it yourself."

"Such was my intention; but I have changed my mind since you showed me the danger and absurdity of this expedition in search of an almost unknown street. The post will do what I am unable to do, and will do it much better, for at this hour I should have had considerable difficulty in waking up the person whom I wished to see."

"But this person is doubtless expecting you," suggested Paul.

"No," replied the girl, quietly. "It is more than likely that I should have failed to gain admission; so it is all for the best."



"So now you have only to return to the person who entrusted you with the commission. You will undoubtedly deem it advisable to relate the adventures which have befallen you, and——"

"I have already told you that I have no report to make, for I received no orders. I started out of my own accord for reasons I am not obliged to disclose to you."

"Nor do I ask you to disclose them."

"No; but confess that you would like to know them," replied the girl, smiling mischievously.

"Something I should like far better to know is you yourself, mademoiselle."

"What! a declaration? It seems to me rather premature."

"It would be, I admit, if it were one; but I have too much sense to pretend to have fallen in love with you at first sight, though I can truly say that you have made a deep impression upon me. Your beauty and grace have charmed me, as well as your wit and courage. A chance has brought me in your way, and I should like to see you again."

"I cannot promise that, but I assure you I shall retain a very pleasant recollection of our meeting; and now let me go."

"To the Rue Norvins?"

"You know better."

"Where, then?"

"Really, you take an unfair advantage of the situation, sir. I did not expect such unseemly persistence on your part. I shall go where I please, and I hope you will not venture to follow me."

"Pray, don't forbid it, mademoiselle; for I shall be obliged to disobey you."

"What! you intend to accompany me against my will?"

"Yes; and I'm sure you won't refuse to hear my reasons for this rather tyrannical proceeding. It is not for pleasure that I shall accompany you, but from a sense of duty. You cannot dispense with my escort. The danger would be the same wherever you went. A woman cannot wander about the streets of Paris at night time without exposing herself to insult and positive peril. With me you have nothing to fear, and I swear upon my honour to conduct you wherever you are pleased to go, and to leave you as soon as I have seen you in a safe place—that is to say, in a house; but until then I shall not leave you, whatever you may say or do."

The girl hung her head. She was evidently impressed by Paul's arguments, perhaps because she saw the justice of them, but more probably because she saw no means of escaping from the protection forced upon her. Paul, who was watching her furtively all the while, said to himself: "She is unwilling to be taken back to the Avenue Gabriel. She is afraid of putting me on Madame de Marcenac's track. If she knew who I am, and what I saw while I was opposite the garden gate, she would not be so long in deciding what to do. But she will have to make up her mind to go there sooner or later, for I shall not leave her. I shall learn nothing more to-night, but to-morrow I shall pass all the houses in the Rue Norvins in review. The street cannot be a very long one, and gold opens every door. I shall soon ascertain with whom Bertha is carrying on a secret correspondence, even if I am obliged to station a spy in the street!"

"I admit, sir, that your arguments are well worthy of consideration," the girl now replied; "besides, I have not the power to send you away. So I consent to accept your escort. True, it will be rather an enforced

protectorate; but I believe you incapable of telling a falsehood, and you have just solemnly promised me not to carry things too far. There is a slight difficulty, however; I have nowhere to go."

"Nowhere to go?"

"In other words, I have no home in Paris. I had just arrived from the country when you met me."

"But you must know some one here, even if it only be the person to whose house you intended going!"

"Yes; but I have given up going there. It is too late."

"But you will go to-morrow, of course?"

"What good will it do? She will receive my letter, which contains all I wished to say to her. I shall leave Paris to-morrow morning by the first train."

"At six or seven o'clock, no doubt. But what do you propose doing in the meantime?"

"That is precisely what troubles me. I think I can do no better than wait at the station until it is time for the train to start."

"At what station?" inquired Paul, eagerly.

"At the Saint Lazare one," was the rather reluctant response.

"But you cannot spend four hours in a waiting-room; besides, you would hardly be allowed to remain there. We must devise some other plan, mademoiselle."

"I really wish you would. Pray, advise me," replied the girl, with an artlessness which was unquestionably assumed.

"Does she want to try me?" Paul said to himself. "She certainly knows, by this time, that I have only followed her to learn where she is going, and where she came from. Now, she is perhaps endeavouring to find out who I am, so that she may tell Madame de Marcenac. If I leave her, she will take refuge in Madame de Marcenac's house, and as I shall never set foot in it again, I shall have no other opportunity of seeing her. I must keep her with me at any cost, but how?"

"Shall we take a cab, and drive about?" he suggested, rather timidly.

"No, certainly not; that would be extremely improper."

"Who would know it?"

"I should, and I should never forgive myself. I might as well take supper with you in a private room at some restaurant."

"And why not, if you are hungry?" inquired Paul, at his wits' end.

To his great surprise, the girl, instead of taking offence, began to laugh, and said without the slightest hesitation: "I am obliged to confess that I am nearly famished. I dined before leaving home, and this long walk has given me an appetite. Still I could not, with propriety, sup alone with my defender, whom I highly esteem, but who is an entire stranger to me. So I prefer fasting until the morning."

"If it is the idea of a *tête-à-tête* which alarms you, that difficulty can be easily overcome. We can be served in a public room."

"Are there any restaurants open at this hour?"

"I know two that are always full at night time. The crowd is rather mixed, I must admit, still, many persons go there out of curiosity, and have no cause to regret their visit. You only need an escort capable of compelling the people present to treat you with respect. If you like, I will be your cavalier, and you can then, without the slightest risk, witness a sight which will not only be new to you, but exceedingly amusing, I assure you."

"It is a very tempting offer; but——"

"You will see nothing of a nature to shock you ; besides, you will surely do me the justice to believe that I should advise nothing that would compromise you. None of these people know you, nor will you ever meet them anywhere again. You can remain at the restaurant until it is time to take the first train, and then I will put you into a carriage without asking your name or even what station you are going to."

"What will you think of me if I accept?"

"I shall think you are as sensible as you are brave," replied Paul, unblushingly. Had he spoken his mind freely, he would have added : "I understand you, my dear. You hope to make your escape during the supper ; but you will not succeed ; and unless I am very much mistaken, the champagne will loosen your tongue."

"Where is the restaurant to which you think of taking me?" inquired the girl.

"On the Boulevard des Capucines, mademoiselle ; some little distance, but you said a few moments ago that you did not care to drive."

"Let us start on foot. On the way we will see."

The girl, who had been so shy at first, now seemed to hesitate at nothing for, on reaching the Place Saint-Georges, and seeing a cabman watering his horse, which was harnessed to a vacant victoria, she remarked, laughing : "I suppose there would be no serious impropriety in driving a short distance with you in an open vehicle, and we should reach our destination sooner."

Paul hastily availed himself of this permission, and a five minutes' drive brought them to the door of the Café Américain, which Paul had selected in preference to the Café du Helder, because he was much less likely to meet acquaintances there. Several vehicles were still standing before the restaurant, but the majority of the customers had gone off, for the establishment on the ground floor was closed. On reaching the glass door which opens into the large room overlooking the boulevard upstairs, Paul stopped and peeped in. The number of people present was unusually small, and he did not see a single familiar face. This suited him exactly, and he immediately entered in advance of his companion, who did not seem at all embarrassed. The baron had formerly frequented the Café Américain, and he was sufficiently well-known there to be greeted by the head-waiter with effusion. "I do not want any near neighbours," Paul said to him in a low tone.

The shrewd waiter, who fancied he understood the situation, thereupon led the couple to the further end of the room where there was a whole row of unoccupied tables. Three of these he reserved by tilting back the chairs, to show that they were engaged, and he then escorted the baron and his companion to the middle one. He placed them side by side, and the young girl made no objection to an arrangement which enabled her to see the entire room, although it also exposed her to the scrutiny of every one present. She bore the examination unflinchingly, though she soon perceived that all eyes were fixed upon her ; but she refused to remove her cloak and hat, giving as an excuse, that she merely wore a travelling-dress. "But you will suffer with the heat," urged Paul.

"I would rather do that than show my plain gown to those women who are so gorgeously attired in silk and satin," she replied, gaily. "I should lose too much by the comparison."

"On the contrary, you would gain by it. Will you order supper?"

"I am quite incapable of achieving such a feat."

"Then I shall order some shrimps, *pâté de foie gras*, a salad, and——"

"Oh, enough, enough! I eat very little, even when I am hungry."

"Are you afraid of a glass of champagne?"

"I am very fond of it, though I never drank it but once. However, I shall be delighted to try it again."

Paul's companion seemed to be in blissful ignorance of his projects, for she allowed him to pour her out a full glass of Moët's *Brut Impérial*, and she drained it unhesitatingly. "Champagne is very nice," she said, with a smile; "especially when it is iced. I think I should soon become exceedingly fond of it."

"I am sure it only depends upon yourself to make it your ordinary drink."

"Yes, if I were rich; but I am not."

"Are you sure?"

"Am I sure!" exclaimed the girl, laughing heartily. "Do you take me for a princess in disguise? Don't you see that I am very plainly dressed?"

"You will never convince me that you are a dressmaker or seamstress. You don't look like a person of that class."

"If I told you that I was an assistant teacher in a young ladies' boarding-school, would you believe me?"

"Perhaps so; though I should inquire where the boarding-school is. The rules, certainly, cannot be very severe——"

"Because you have met me in the streets after midnight. That is true; so I am an adventuress. This conclusion is perfectly logical, though not very flattering to me."

"On the contrary, it is absurd. If you were what you say, you would not have talked to me as you have."

"Ah, well! confess that I am an enigma, but also confess that I am not obliged to tell you my name or profession, or where I live. That is all I ask. I see you are an honourable man, and that is quite enough for me——"

"Because you do not take sufficient interest in me to care whether you see me again or not, while I——"

"You, my gallant cavalier, are trying to convince me that you are in love with me, but in twenty-four hours you will have forgotten my existence as completely as I shall have forgotten your compliments, though I shall long remember the service you have rendered me."

Paul was about to make a warm reply, for the moment for employing all his eloquence had come; but the words died away on his lips, for, to his amazement, he beheld the mysterious Viscount de la Cadière entering the room. What had brought him to this restaurant?—probably a desire for some kind of refreshment, and he certainly had a right to regale himself after his victory at cards. In any case, he could not have come in search of the baron, for he could not know he was there, and yet, he at once directed his steps towards the corner where Lizzy and the fair stranger were seated side by side. "Can he be going to speak to me?" thought Paul. "It would be the height of impudence on his part, and if he attempts it, I shall treat him as he deserves."

Paul soon discovered, however, that he was mistaken in his conjectures, for M. de la Cadière, apparently absorbed in reflections of no very cheerful nature, had not seen either himself or his companion, and merely went towards them because there were some vacant tables close by. He was about to seat himself when he saw the inverted chairs, and just as he was going to inquire if the seats were engaged, he looked up and recognised Paul.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur," he said, stepping back with the evident intention of seeking a seat elsewhere; but almost at the same moment he perceived the strange girl, and, on seeing her, he seemed to hesitate, although only for an instant.

His hesitation was so short that no one but Paul would have noticed it; but he was on the watch, and nothing escaped his keen eyes. As he gave the strange girl a glance he fancied he detected a blush upon her cheek; but M. de la Cadière, after a few more words of apology, turned away, and took a seat which the waiter pointed out to him on the right, a little further on. "Are you acquainted with that gentleman?" De Lizy inquired of his companion.

"Not at all; are you?" quietly responded the girl.

"I know him by sight; I have met him at the club."

"It is evident that he is not a favourite with you."

"How do you know that?"

"I thought members of the same club always spoke to each other, but you scarcely returned his bow."

"I do, indeed, thoroughly dislike him, and I am quite sure he entertains no very strong affection for me. Such an antipathy is always mutual."

"Like sympathy."

"Then you and I are congenial spirits, for you are aware of the admiration with which I was inspired by the very first glance at you."

"I don't accept your statements implicitly, still I don't mind admitting that I should not be here if I had taken a dislike to you."

She had not said as much as this before, and Paul instinctively felt that this gracious avowal was intended to effect a change in the conversation, which had turned for a moment upon M. de la Cadière. So he took the compliment for what it was worth, and returned to his original plan, which was to turn the girl's head by making love to her, although, after all, he depended more upon the wine he was pouring out for her than upon his honeyed words.

But, though she drained her glass repeatedly, she remained complete mistress of herself, and said nothing but what she wished to say. "Well, if you don't dislike me," asked the baron, "why do you forbid my making any attempt to see you again?"

"That seems to be a sort of refrain with you," retorted the strange girl. "I am surprised that a man of talent like yourself should repeat the same thing over and over again. In the first place, I have not the audacity to try to control your actions in any way; besides——"

"Pardon me; but did you not forbid me to follow you?"

"But I have not the power to prevent you from doing so. You need no better proof of that than the fact that you met me shortly after mid night, and are still with me at four o'clock in the morning. But you are eating nothing, while I am positively devouring the viands. That *pâté* is delicious, and I should very much like to have some more of it."

Paul hastily helped her, and refilled the glass she had just emptied. He had not touched his wine before, but he now rose, glass in hand, and exclaimed: "I drink to your lovers!"

"Why not?" she laughingly replied; "I have no lovers now, but I shall have some, in time, perhaps; and the Romans always drank to the unknown gods."

"You are evidently quite a blue-stockings!"

"I know little or nothing—not even what a love-affair is, nor am I at all anxious to know."

"Then it is useless to propose that toast. Suppose I drink to the health of your friend in the Rue Norvins, instead?"

"The Rue Norvins? What do you mean? Oh, yes, I recollect; that is the name you thought you overheard when I asked my way of the policemen. You were mistaken, sir."

"I think not; for, when I spoke of that street a short time ago——"

"I did not think it worth while to contradict you, because you would have bothered me with questions I did not care to answer. But now that you have promised not to question me, I don't mind saying that you would only waste your time by trying to obtain any information respecting me in the street you mention."

"She suspects my scheme," Paul said to himself; "but she has made a blunder by letting me see that she is afraid. I shall make inquiries about her there to-morrow."

He was on the point of assuring her that he had not even thought of such a thing when the conversation was unexpectedly interrupted. A number of persons, arrayed in fancy costumes, rushed noisily into the room, and it was evident enough that they had just come from some masked ball. The women of the party were all pretty, and it was evident that their escorts did not belong to the lower classes, although they were terribly intoxicated.

They were greeted with exclamations of delight by several people present; but Paul de Lizy did not share the enthusiasm, for his companion appeared rather alarmed, and he feared that he might be compelled to abandon the siege, in order to protect her from the coarse jests of the new arrivals. Matters became even worse when the intruders made a rush for the unoccupied tables, and in the twinkling of an eye Paul and his companion found themselves surrounded by a noisy, gesticulating crowd which proceeded to take forcible possession of the seats hitherto reserved. Anger seized hold of the baron, and made him forget the most elementary rules of prudence. He pushed back one table so violently that one of the intruders was dashed upon the floor, and, at the same time, he caught another by the throat and dragged him into the middle of the room, where he left him staggering and cursing. This vigorous *sortie* was highly successful, but unfortunately, it was followed by a regular battle, for the remaining members of the party rushed to the assistance of their comrades, and a general mill was the result.

Paul was an expert boxer, and his blows all fell with telling force upon his antagonists, but he was one against many, and he would have fared badly if the landlord and the waiters had not come to the rescue. They naturally took the part of the baron with whom they were acquainted, against the disorderly party, which was certainly no credit to the establishment, and the champions of law and order finally triumphed. The intruders, ignominiously expelled from the room, tumbled down stairs to be met by the police, whose attention had been attracted by the uproar. The victory was complete.

But when Paul de Lizy, ashamed of having taken part in such a disgraceful scene, returned to his seat, to apologise to the fair stranger, she was no longer there. She had evidently taken advantage of the confusion to make her escape, and as the conflict had lasted some little time, she must already be far away. Paul glanced around him in search of any one who could

give him some information respecting the young woman's mysterious disappearance, and in his despair he would even have applied to M. de la Cadière; but, to his profound astonishment, he perceived that that gentleman had also disappeared.

## V.

WHILE Paul de Lizy was meeting with these adventures, his friend Jacques Sigoulès, was sleeping soundly in his modest apartment at the Hôtel Continental, where he had taken up his abode on his arrival in Paris. When he at last awoke, he resolved to call upon Madame de Marcenac that very day. She had invited him to do so, but she only received guests from five to seven in the evening, and if he paid his visit then he would probably have no opportunity of seeing her alone. After prolonged reflection, Sigoulès decided to spend his morning as usual, that is to say, mount his horse, and take a long ride, returning to the hotel in time for breakfast.

After twenty-five years of cavalry service, a daily ride had become indispensable to the colonel's health; and at half-past nine he went downstairs to the court-yard of the hotel, where he found his horse awaiting him. He rode, as usual, to the Bois de Boulogne, taking the first avenue he came to. He had just passed the road to Saint Denis, and had reached the avenue leading to Longchamps, when he met a cab which was apparently coming from the Porte Maillot.

There was nothing extraordinary in the meeting itself, but the colonel, to his great astonishment, saw that the vehicle contained a lady who strongly resembled Madame de Marcenac. He said to himself that he must be mistaken. Why should Madame de Marcenac be driving about in a shabby cab when she had carriages of her own? Thinking that his eyes must have deceived him, the colonel rode on a short distance, but suddenly he changed his mind and turned his horse's head. The cab was still in sight, although considerably in advance of him; but before he could overtake it, he saw it draw up on the right hand side of the road, and a lady alight, and then, after a few words to the driver, disappear among the trees.

Sigoulès was too far off to distinguish the lady's features, but he again thought he recognised the figure and bearing of the countess. He did not urge his horse forward very rapidly for fear of attracting the attention of the cabman, who had left the box, and was pacing to and fro, smoking his pipe like a man who knows that he has plenty of time at his disposal. The colonel soon reached the spot, and saw that the lady must have taken a narrow side-path intended only for pedestrians. "Where does this path lead, my man?" he inquired of the driver.

"To the Isle of Cedars, sir," was the reply.

Sigoulès had never heard of this island, and he secretly wondered upon what lake it was situated. "Is the island only reached by boat?" he asked.

"On foot also; there is a bridge; in fact, I think there are three of them; but as they are wooden ones only foot-passengers are allowed to use them."

The colonel rewarded the man with a piece of silver, and followed the next road on the right hand, feeling sure that it would take him near the island. He soon found that he was right, for, through the trees, he caught occasional glimpses of a small artificial stream encircling a verdant mound upon which clumps of ornamental shrubs and trees had recently been planted. The only building was a kind of Swiss chalet, evidently intended

to do duty as a refreshment place during the summer months. A little further on there was a rustic bridge, which the lady must have crossed over. She had now disappeared, but was probably concealed from view by one of the clumps of shrubbery. The colonel dismounted, tied his horse to a tree, and then cautiously advanced until he reached a path bordering the stream. There he paused, and half-concealed by the trunk of an old oak, he waited for the lady to appear again. A few moments afterwards, he saw some one approaching from the opposite side of the island, but it was not Madame de Marcenac. Indeed, it was a little girl, accompanied by a woman dressed as a nurse. The little girl was about two years old, and was dressed handsomely. She did not, however, carry any ball, hoop, skipping-rope, or other playthings with which children generally amuse themselves out of doors. The woman who accompanied her was of middle age, and looked much more like a peasant woman than a Parisian nurse. She wore a long woollen mantle with a hood, which she had pulled over her head, and she looked tall and strong, though she leaned upon a large red umbrella as she walked.

The colonel examined her attentively, though he scarcely knew why, and he was just thinking of crossing the bridge, which he saw on his left, when the child suddenly clapped her hands with an exclamation of joy, and darted towards a clump of trees thick enough to prevent Sigoulès from seeing who was on the other side. However, the child's little pantomime and ardent haste showed plainly enough that she had just seen some one she knew, and wished to join her. The nurse followed her at a distance, waving her umbrella as a signal, or as a greeting to some person under the cedars, behind which she also soon disappeared.

After waiting twenty minutes or more, the colonel became very impatient. Not a single person could he see upon the island. The conversation which was going on behind the trees might be prolonged indefinitely, and he felt little inclination to tarry any longer in the same spot, as he had come to the conclusion that the lady he had seen was not the countess, for this child with a country nurse put all his conjectures utterly to rout. Accordingly Sigoulès retraced his steps, but not without looking back several times. He then unfastened his horse, and led him along the path. "A pretty part I am playing here!" he growled. "Had any one told me yesterday that I should ever play the spy on a woman, I would have cut him across the face with my riding-whip; and yet, for an hour past, I have been manœuvring exactly like a detective."

The words had barely passed his lips, when at the other end of the bridge he saw the lady again. He recognised her instantly by her black hat and her fur-trimmed mantle. She was walking rapidly, and seemed to take no interest in what was going on around her, for she walked straight on without once turning or looking to the right or left.

Sigoulès was still some distance from the bridge, but as the lady was about to cross it their meeting was inevitable. Sigoulès reached it the first, though only by a few seconds, and he had time to see the child and her nurse walking towards the other end of the island. At the same moment, the lady, who was now only a few feet from him, lifted her veil, and he instantly recognised Madame de Marcenac, who certainly had no desire to conceal herself, for she uncovered her face quite of her own accord. Advancing towards him with a smile upon her lips, she exclaimed: "You here, monsieur! I am very happy to meet you, although I did not expect it. What lucky chance brings you here?"



"A chance for which I am most grateful," replied the colonel. "I intended to call on you to-day at about one o'clock, for I was extremely anxious to see you. To kill time till then, I mounted my horse, and my lucky star brought me to this part of the Bois de Boulogne."

"And I," said the countess, "on waking this morning, was seized with such an irresistible desire for some fresh air, that I could not wait for my horses to be fed and harnessed; but hastily sent for a hackney-coach. Of course I did not care to be seen on the fashionable drives in such a vehicle, so I ordered the cabman to take me to the Isle of Cedars, which is rarely visited by the *élite*, although it is one of the most charming retreats in the Bois. I was about to return home, but now I have met you, I shall take advantage of this opportunity for a little quiet conversation, for it seems to me that we must have a good deal to say to each other."

"First, I have an apology to make to you," said Sigoulès, "for venturing to present myself at your house without your permission."

"As well as without Paul's," Madame de Marcenac interrupted, laughing. "He pretended yesterday that he had made an appointment with you at my house, but I did not believe a word of it."

"I confess that it was not true."

"So in spite of my prohibition and your promise, you followed me, saw where I lived, and made an attempt to meet me again."

"You are about right," murmured the colonel, feeling very uncomfortable, but not deeming it advisable to state how he had learned her address.

"Ah, well! I forgive you, as you have at least partially atoned for your conduct by not referring to our former meeting in the presence of Monsieur de Lizy. He knows nothing whatever about the affair, does he?" she added, with a searching look at Sigoulès.

Madame de Marcenac's look made the colonel's eyes droop, and his embarrassment did not escape her notice. She turned pale, and exclaimed, in a voice that trembled with emotion: "So you have betrayed me!"

The words cut the colonel to the quick, especially as he did not deserve the reproof. "Madame," he said, drawing himself up proudly, "I am an old soldier, and I have never betrayed any one."

"When I first met you, you certainly behaved like an honourable man. You knew, too, that I should not like Monsieur de Lizy to hear of my trip to Fontainebleau, and so you pretended not to recognise me. I am deeply grateful to you for your consideration, but how does it happen that you betrayed my secret after the interview in which you displayed so much generosity?"

"Madame, Paul de Lizy has been my companion in arms, and is still my friend. When we left your house he had some doubts. He questioned me closely, and I gave him evasive answers. He was not satisfied, and adjured me in the name of our old friendship to conceal nothing from him. He told me, too, that his marriage with you was decided upon——"

"And so you told him everything, without asking yourself if I was guiltless, and you ruined my happiness for ever, although I have not the slightest cause for self-reproach."

"You are very much mistaken, madame. I told Paul that I was sure the object of your visit to Fontainebleau was not one you would have any desire to conceal, and that he had no right to condemn you without a hearing. I even begged him to ask you for the explanation, which you certainly would not decline to give him."

"And he refused? He persisted in believing me guilty?"

"He was so excited and troubled that all his accustomed good sense seemed to have deserted him. He even made many absurd vows which I trust he will not keep."

"He has probably sworn that he will never see me again!" exclaimed Madame de Marcenac, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh! he would have visited you before this had there not seemed to be a sort of fatality connected with this unfortunate affair."

"Why, what else has happened?"

"On leaving your house, we met the cab-driver who took you home upon your return from Fontainebleau. The man recognised me; indeed, it was he who had previously told me where you resided. Lizy also questioned him, and the fellow declared that, during the past fortnight, he had several times driven you home from the terminus of the Lyons line, and always at the same hour."

"And even if this story be true, what of it?"

"That is exactly what I said to Lizy. The number of trips was of no importance. But Lizy would not listen to me. Wishing, no doubt, to forget his sorrows in play, he decided to go to one of the clubs he belongs to. He lost a large sum of money there, and the man who won his money, not content with that, broke his heart by slandering you."

"To whom do you refer, sir?"

"To a gentleman who, after winning the baron's money, felt it necessary to warn him against you—Oh, not before the others! He drew the baron aside, under pretext of condoling with him, and told him that he, also, had met you at Fontainebleau. He declared, indeed, that, after meeting you in a house where he also visited, he had seen you take a path leading to the forest, and enter a lonely cottage, the key of which seemed to be in your possession."

"Such espionage is simply infamous! And Paul believed this man?"

"I regret to say he did, madame, and he became angry with me for defending you. We parted quite coolly. But he still loves you; the fact that he is suffering martyrdom is sufficient proof of that. It is evidently only a misunderstanding, which you can easily set right if you have sufficient confidence in me to tell me frankly what took you to Fontainebleau."

Madame de Marcenac shook her head, and murmured sadly: "No; I cannot!"

"You cannot!" exclaimed the colonel; "and why? What prevents you from clearing yourself by telling the truth?"

"Even if I did so, Monsieur de Lizy would not believe me," murmured the countess.

"You are surely mistaken. Paul is most anxious to believe you, for he loves you madly."

"I repeat, sir, that it is impossible. I am not at liberty to divulge a secret that belongs to another person. If Monsieur de Lizy had had sufficient confidence in me to marry me without demanding an explanation, I should have told him the secret he is so anxious to know—I should have disclosed it to him by-and-by, in a few months or a few years, according to circumstances; but until a certain event comes to pass, I must be silent."

"I confess that I don't understand you. If this secret concerns some other person—a person Lizy does not know—what have you to fear? Lizy is a strictly honourable man."

"I am sure of that; but he would demand proofs, and I cannot furnish these proofs without compromising a friend."

"That is very unfortunate; but allow me, madame, to express my astonishment that you should sacrifice your own happiness to save the reputation of a person who certainly cannot be an intimate friend."

"It is not merely a matter of reputation, but one of life and death to the person I speak of. I can say no more now: I have said too much already."

Sigoulès racked his brain to discover some plausible explanation of all this, but utterly failed. "What am I to tell Monsieur de Lizy respecting my interview with you?" he asked, sadly. "Must I tell him that you refuse to vindicate yourself?"

"Tell him whatever you please, monsieur," Madame de Marcenac quietly replied. "Monsieur de Lizy will learn some day that he has accused me unjustly; but it will then be too late to atone for the past. That will be his punishment. I shall suffer more than he will, but I will betray no one's confidence."

"I admire your generosity; but I really think you are carrying it too far; besides, it is useless. What is to prevent Paul or myself from visiting the lonely house at Fontainebleau, and ascertaining the object of *your* visit? If you have been slandered, such a step on our part would result most unfortunately for the lady in whose welfare you take such a deep interest."

This disguised threat had no effect upon the countess. "Go," she said, unflinchingly.

"Then you did not visit the house? The story has been invented——"

"By whom? I should very much like to know."

"I told you; by a member of Paul's club—a man who is called Monsieur de la Cadière."

"He! He!" exclaimed Madame de Marcenac, with an emotion she made no attempt to conceal.

"Is it possible that you know him?" inquired Sigoulès, eagerly.

"I have seen him; and I know that he was formerly an acquaintance of my husband."

"He told Paul that he met you a week ago, on Saturday, at the house of Monsieur Basfroi, at Fontainebleau."

"That is true. Basfroi was once my father's partner, though I have never had occasion to mention the fact to Monsieur de Lizy."

"He knows it, madame, from a gentleman whom he met in your garden yesterday, just as he was going to call on you."

"Yes; Monsieur Chardin, another of my father's old friends. Monsieur de Lizy told me he had been talking with him, but he did not make any allusion to Monsieur Basfroi, and I am a little surprised at it."

"He was afraid of giving you pain."

"I do not understand you. People accuse Monsieur Basfroi of usury. I do not believe it; but, however that may be, he is, nevertheless, a person whom I have known from my infancy, and whom my father must have considered an honourable man, as he selected him as a partner. He has always been a welcome guest at my house, and I shall continue to visit him, even if I marry the Baron de Lizy."

"You will never see him again, for he is dead. There are full accounts of the tragic event in all the papers."

"I very seldom read them; but I am sure that the report is false. I saw Monsieur Basfroi only the day before yesterday, and he was then looking remarkably well."

"He was murdered on the night before last, at eleven o'clock."

"Murdered!" repeated Madame de Marcenac, turning as pale as death. "No! that is impossible. You must be mistaken."

"The police have been in pursuit of the assassin for thirty-six hours, and have not yet found him, at least not to my knowledge. All Paris is talking about the affair. They were even discussing it at the club where Paul lost his money; and Paul himself could give you full particulars, for he only narrowly escaped being charged with the crime."

"He said nothing to me about it. Had I known it yesterday, or even last evening, I should have — But who could have committed such a frightful crime?"

"Probably one of his debtors, who took advantage of the opportunity afforded him by a business interview, for although the safe was found open, it had not been forced."

"The man who slandered me owed him money, to my certain knowledge."

"Monsieur de la Cadière? It is quite possible, then, that he was the assassin. Your evidence will be of great importance."

"Do you think it probable that I shall be examined?" inquired the countess, looking more and more troubled. "I hope not; for I have nothing to disclose."

"You are sure, however, that this Cadière was still in Monsieur Basfroi's debt?"

"Don't mention that man's name again. It fills me with horror!"

"I will not, madame, as you forbid it; but remember that Paul is in despair, and that a word, a single word from you——"

"That word I shall not speak. Don't insist any further, monsieur; but allow me to pass on. The terrible news you have just told me has overcome me completely. In a few days, however, I shall be more calm, and then it will give me pleasure to see you—providing you make no further allusion to an engagement which is now broken off for ever. I wish to forget him, and I shall succeed."

"I submit to your will, madame; but I don't think Paul will allow the matter to rest where it is. I think he will endeavour to verify the truth of Monsieur de la Cadière's statement."

"Let him," replied the countess, coldly. "Adieu, monsieur." And with a haughty bow she turned away before her companion could attempt to detain her.

## VI.

THE colonel was now overcome with consternation, for, after what he had just heard, he was almost convinced of the lady's guilt. He sadly retraced his steps to the spot where he had left his steed, mounted, and put spurs to his horse. The animal, which was one hired from Tattersall's, and had never been in the cavalry service, was unaccustomed to the spur, and started off at a furious gallop down the Allée des Poteaux, which was now crowded with riders returning to Paris. At the sound of the mad gallop behind them they were filled with consternation. Some hastened on; others drew to the side of the road, and Sigoulès, no longer master of his steed, continued his mad course attended by a chorus of imprecations. The colonel, who retained all his presence of mind, was disgusted beyond expression. "To think that I should be run away with," he hissed be-

tween his set teeth, "run away with, like some clerk, who only mounts a horse on Sundays; and if I come in collision with any one, or break a leg, all Paris will know that a cavalry officer came to grief while riding in the Bois."

He had almost decided to leap off into the shrubbery, at the risk of breaking his neck, when, in the open space which had been cleared before him, he perceived a gentleman, mounted upon a tall horse, barring the way in such a manner as to make a collision inevitable. Indeed, he seemed to invite it; for, instead of making an attempt to get out of the way, he remained as motionless as a statue in the middle of the road. "Look at that idiot!" muttered the colonel, in a furious passion. "We are both dead men. Fool! unless you want to commit suicide, why do you station yourself in front of a locomotive going at full speed?"

But in another second, he perceived that the man whom he was anathematising had determined to try and stop the runaway horse. With his reins gathered up short in his left hand, his body bent forward, and his right arm outstretched, he was waiting to seize the bridle of the colonel's steed as he passed along. Sigoulès prepared to do what he could to assist his would-be-preserver, although he was by no means sanguine as to the result. "I shall be thrown, and so will he," the colonel thought, as he pressed both knees into the sides of the flying animal. However, just as the head of the runaway horse came within reach of the stranger's hand, the latter seized hold of the right rein near the bit with extraordinary skill and strength. The horse, suddenly brought to a stand-still, reared and plunged; but Sigoulès did not lose his seat, and the frantic animal, feeling that he had at last found his master, soon ceased to struggle. "Thank you, sir," said Sigoulès, "you have certainly rendered me a great service. This accident would not have happened to me if I had been astride one of my own horses, for I assure you that I understand my business."

"You have proved it, colonel," was the reply. "Any one else would have been thrown."

On hearing the word "colonel," Sigoulès, who had at first only thought of soothing his wounded vanity, turned in astonishment, and recognised M. de la Cadière. "Is it to you, sir," he exclaimed, "that I owe—"

"Oh, you owe me nothing," replied the viscount, politely. "I have done precisely what you would have done if you had been in my place—what I would have done for any one—for I did not recognise you until a moment ago. Now, however, I am delighted that I have been able to do one of Monsieur de Lizy's friends a service." Sigoulès made no reply, for he almost regretted not having broken his neck, so distasteful was the idea of being under an obligation to a man he so thoroughly detested. "Parisian curiosity knows no bounds," continued M. de la Cadière, carelessly. "Every one who witnessed the affair will soon be crowding around us. If you will take my advice, colonel, we will turn to the left, into the road round the lake, which is now quite deserted."

This suggestion suited the colonel, who did not care to be seen talking with this pretended nobleman, whose reputation was none of the best, that is if Dauzance's veracity could be relied upon. "You are right, sir," said Sigoulès. "I shall take that road, and I hope no one will follow me." He also hoped that M. de la Cadière would understand that his company was not desired, and so go off in another direction.

However the viscount paid no attention to this ill-disguised dismissal, but quietly placed himself on the colonel's right hand, as if it were the

most natural thing in the world. "Excuse me, sir," he began again, "excuse me for having insisted upon a private interview with your friend, the Baron de Lizy, yesterday evening. I wished to explain some facts which were known only to ourselves, and——"

"They are known to me now," said Sigoulès, interrupting him. "Lizy has told me all."

This announcement did not seem to trouble the viscount in the least. "I thought so," he replied coldly; "and for that reason I am speaking to you now. My secret is safe, since Monsieur de Lizy has confided it to you."

"Your secret? Oh, yes! that story of the wronged husband's unexpected return, I suppose you mean."

"Do you doubt the truth of it?"

"I have no particular reason to doubt it, or believe it. What struck me most forcibly in my friend's story was that you are afraid of being accused of some crime, and that you tried to implicate a lady of his acquaintance, to whom I myself was presented yesterday."

"The Countess de Marcenac? Yes; I was obliged to speak of her. She was at the house of the murdered usurer the other day, and I just saw her returning to Paris in a shabby cab. I could not help wondering where she had been at that hour, and in such a vehicle, when she has five or six horses and several carriages of her own."

"Just as you wondered last week what she was doing in a lonely house at Fontainebleau. Why do you take such an interest in her? Are you acquainted with her?"

"I occasionally met her, years ago, and I was very well acquainted with her husband, the late Count de Marcenac."

"Who was one of Basfroi's clients as well as yourself, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly; and it was Basfroi who arranged the marriage. He had been the partner of Monsieur Plantier, a retired merchant, and the father of a charming daughter. Marcenac owed Basfroi a good deal of money, and was unable to pay it; so Basfroi, being anxious to get his coin, persuaded his friend Plantier to accept this penniless nobleman as a son-in-law. They all had their reasons for being accommodating."

"What do you mean, sir? Do you dare pretend that the countess——"

"I pretend nothing. You would probably think I was slandering her. Monsieur de Lizy was angry with me last night when I spoke of her."

"I shall not be angry, for I don't think of marrying the Count de Marcenac's widow."

"But your friend does. Ah! I ought to have held my peace. That is what I shall do in future."

"Excuse me, sir, but you have said too much to stop here. You have just given me to understand that the conduct of Mademoiselle Plantier was not what it should have been before her marriage with the Count de Marcenac; and that Monsieur de Marcenac, tempted by a large dowry, shut his eyes to his wife's antecedents."

"He was quite capable of it."

"Were you in his confidence?"

"Hardly. We had similar tastes, and we often met at the clubs and elsewhere. I knew him at Marseilles, and he took me to his château in Périgord, which was so heavily mortgaged that it was sold the following year. But after his marriage, we lost sight of each other. He was killed in a duel by a Russian. The cause of this duel was not generally known,

but as you have questioned me respecting his wife's past, I will tell that the Russian ventured to attack Mademoiselle Plantier's reputation."

"Well, sir," said the colonel, "having been Monsieur de Lizy's companion in arms, I naturally take a great interest in this matter, and I should be greatly obliged if you would explain yourself more clearly. Do you imagine that Madame de Marcenac has a lover, whom she visits in secret?"

"You place me in a very embarrassing position," was the reply. "I have my ideas on the subject, but they are little more than conjectures, verified, however, by numerous incidents which have come to my notice. Mademoiselle Plantier was educated at a boarding-school at Fontainebleau, and she remained there much longer than young girls usually do. She had just left school when she married; at least, such was the report, although some people pretended that a year intervened between the close of her school days and her entrance into society. Monsieur Basfroi had severed his business connection with Monsieur Plantier and had taken up his abode at Fontainebleau. He was probably acquainted with all the particulars of Mademoiselle Plantier's past, and helped to save her from the consequences of her indiscretion. This probably explains why Madame de Marcenac kept up her acquaintance with the old rascal, although she was probably not aware of the disgraceful business he carried on. And, by-the-way," added M. de la Cadière, "I wonder how she will receive the news of his death? On some accounts, she has not much reason to mourn his loss. He probably knew a secret which might ruin her reputation, and now she is its sole possessor."

"I do not understand you."

"If the birth of a child were concealed, and if this child were still living, it may have remained at Fontainebleau under Basfroi's guardianship, and in the care of some woman hired by the mother."

"You imagine, then, that there is a child living in the house which you saw Madame de Marcenac enter."

"Yes; this was the first idea that occurred to me when I saw her there the other day."

"Do you really mean that Madame de Marcenac gave birth to a child prior to her marriage?"

"I half suspect it," said the viscount.

"It would be an easy matter to solve these doubts by going to Fontainebleau and making inquiries there."

"Perhaps so; and as the solution of the problem seems to interest you, I will describe the house where you should make these inquiries. It is painted white, with green blinds, and it is located in the suburbs of the town, just on the edge of the forest. The road is called the Rue des Sorbiers. You will have no difficulty in finding the place, but I am satisfied in my own mind that the child is no longer there. It was probably brought back to Paris several days ago."

"What makes you think so?"

"My meeting Madame de Marcenac a few moments ago. She would not go out so early in the morning for nothing."

"What, do you suppose she has just been to visit her child?"

"Why not? There are plenty of villas to let in the vicinity of the Bois."

"How old would this child probably be?"

"Eight or nine years old, I suppose. Madame de Marcenac must have

been about twenty when she married, and she has been a widow for three or four years now. Marcenac, if I remember rightly, was killed in '79; and it is now '83. Reckon for yourself."

A light had suddenly burst upon the colonel's mind; and he felt almost sure that the little girl he had seen running across the turf and disappearing behind the trees had been going to join her mother. M. de la Cadière was watching him out of the corner of his eye, and complacently noting the effect of his replies. Deeming this a favourable moment for presenting another side of the question, and one that interested him more particularly, he said: "This is all I can tell you, colonel. Permit me now to remind you of the conversation I had last night with your friend—a conversation which I fear has made him my bitter enemy for life. Monsieur de Lizy probably told you that I was afraid of being accused of the murder of Basfroi, and that I threatened to compromise Madame de Marcenac if the authorities troubled me. I did, in fact, tell him that I should be obliged to summon her as a witness in my behalf. Now what would you say, if I told you that she was the only person who gains anything by this man's death?"

"I should not believe you," retorted the colonel, curtly. "On the contrary, she must be greatly the loser if he assisted her in secreting and rearing her child, as you insinuate."

"That is one way of looking at the question," replied M. de la Cadière. "But if Basfroi has made Madame de Marcenac his sole legatee, don't you think that the commissary who investigates the case will give some attention to her? There is an old axiom with lawyers——"

"Which does not apply in the present instance," interrupted Sigoulès. "Madame de Marcenac has an income of eighty thousand francs. Is it likely that she would covet the property of a usurer—who probably never once thought of leaving her his money?"

"You are greatly mistaken there, colonel. He himself told me he intended to do so. This seems to surprise you; but it is nevertheless true. Basfroi had implicit confidence in me. Our business relations were of long standing, and as I invariably paid him promptly, he was always ready to lend me money—at the rate of twenty-five per cent., of course."

"And you say that this usurer told you what disposition he intended to make of his property?"

"A dozen times, colonel; and I think he did not conceal his intentions from the parties most interested, for Marcenac counted upon the money. He often alluded to his expectations in the presence of mutual friends who repeated his remarks to me. But Basfroi did even more. He showed me his will; that is to say, he showed me the envelope in which he had placed it, and very frankly told me that, having no relatives he cared anything about, he had bequeathed his entire fortune to Bertha de Marcenac. I even recollect that I said to him: 'Take care; her husband will squander it all,' and that he replied: 'Oh, I'm not afraid of that. I have taken such precautions that he won't be able to touch a penny of it.'"

"It is extremely probable that this will will never be found," said Sigoulès, becoming more and more thoughtful. "BASFROI'S SAFE WAS SACKED. The murderer abstracted the entire contents."

"And this man has not been found?" asked the viscount.

"Not yet; but the murder was committed only on the night before last, and the investigation has but just begun. It will result in the discovery of the culprit, be assured of that."



"I certainly hope so; but if this man confessed that he acted at the instigation of Madame de Marcenac, what a scandal it would create!"

"More insinuations against the countess!" exclaimed the colonel, now thoroughly incensed. "Indeed, it seems to me that what you say virtually amounts to an accusation."

"By no means. I only called your attention to the fact that——"

"That she is likely to be suspected of the crime, which is about the same thing; besides, if you don't mean to accuse her, why do you harp upon all these theories you have so ingeniously devised? However, I understand your motive perfectly. What you say is intended as a warning to Monsieur de Lizy, who threatened to denounce you; and you hope I shall advise him to be silent. You have made a great mistake. I shall advise him to reveal everything, undeterred by any fear of compromising Madame de Marcenac, who is very well able to defend herself, as your suppositions are simply absurd."

"You speak rather harshly, sir; but your words don't wound me, as I have made no accusation against Madame de Marcenac. Shall we change the subject?"

Sigoulès had endured the viscount's company for twenty minutes or more, and was now thoroughly tired of it, so he resolved to terminate an interview which was becoming more and more irritating. "I don't know, sir," he said drily, "what we can have to talk about, now that *this* subject is exhausted. I can only thank you for stopping my horse, and take leave of you, as I shall now return to Paris. We are probably not going in the same direction."

"My destination is the Hôtel Continental, where I am stopping for the present—the suite of rooms I have rented in the Avenue Kléber not being quite ready for occupancy."

This was a strange coincidence, and Sigoulès was deeply annoyed to learn that he lived under the same roof as M. de la Cadière. But he took good care not to state that his own destination was the Continental; and being more firmly resolved upon an immediate separation than ever, he remarked: "I am going to my club, and think of passing through Neuilly."

"Very well, colonel," replied the viscount; "I see that my company is not desired, and I will leave you. But before I go, may I take the liberty of requesting you to deliver a message to the Baron de Lizy?"

"If it is connected with Madame de Marcenac, you cannot."

"It is in no way connected with her. On leaving the club between three and four o'clock this morning, some whim induced me to enter a night restaurant, and I was not a little surprised to find your friend there in company with a young lady."

"You surprise me. When I left him, at midnight, he was on his way home."

"He must have changed his mind, for I saw him taking supper at the Café Américain with a very pretty young girl, who did not appear to be one of the ordinary frequenters of the establishment."

"Well, what of it?" asked Sigoulès, brusquely.

"Soon afterwards there was a general row, in which Monsieur de Lizy became involved in spite of himself, having been insulted by some drunken men. The girl fled during the fight; I did the same, and on reaching the boulevard, I saw her jump into a cab. Monsieur de Lizy will, perhaps, be glad to know what became of her. You can inform him that I heard her tell the cabman to drive her to the Lyons railway station. Perhaps

she was going to Fontainebleau. And now, colonel, I have the honour to bid you good-morning," concluded the viscount; and turning his horse's head he started off at a brisk trot in the direction of the Porte Dauphine.

The colonel returned to Paris, and went to Tattersall's, where he had a lively altercation with the owner of the unruly animal which had caused him so much mortification. Then, as he was half-starved, he started out in search of the nearest restaurant. Great was his surprise when, on passing a pastrycook's at the corner of the Avenue de Wagram, he beheld the same woman and child whom he had seen on the Isle of Cedars now seated in the shop. The colonel could scarcely believe his eyes. How had these persons been able to reach Paris in advance of him? Pastry is not very satisfying food for a hungry soldier, but the colonel entered the shop, and walked straight to the counter, where he asked for a *brioche* and a glass of sherry. The shop was not large, but it was well stocked, and the woman who kept it was polite and accommodating. She had just offered a chair to the nurse, who had settled herself comfortably in it, and laid her big red umbrella across her lap. She was tall and stout, and her bronzed skin plainly indicated that her life had been spent in the country. The child was younger than Sigoulès had supposed on seeing her from a distance. She could not have been more than nine years old, and she was very pretty. She was a brunette, with a clear olive complexion and delicate features. Long, black tresses waved over her shoulders, and her movements were quick and bird-like, though her expression was unusually serious for a child. She was tastefully dressed, but not like those pretentious dolls which foolish mothers exhibit in the Tuileries Garden or Champs Elysées, and who dare not play or run about for fear of spoiling their fine clothes. When the colonel entered, she was eating a meringue, but she speedily transferred her attention to the tall, heavily-moustached gentleman who smiled upon her without succeeding in making her smile in return.

"Nothing will ever convince me that this little brunette is the daughter of Madame de Marcenac, who is as fair as a lily. She does not resemble her any more than I resemble Monsieur de la Cadière, who is evidently a vile slanderer," thought Sigoulès.

"Bertha, don't eat so fast," cried the nurse. "You will make yourself sick, my child.

"I won't eat so fast if you will let me eat as long as I like," replied the little girl, gravely.

"But you know that your mamma forbade us to stop anywhere."

"Her mamma!" the colonel repeated to himself, in profound consternation. "Then she is the daughter of the countess, after all. So that cur told the truth."

"We can spare ten minutes well enough, as we have a carriage; besides, there is no one waiting for us at home. Mamma won't be there to-day, and my aunt Gabrielle and my cousin Martha are not in Paris."

"Hush, hush, you little chatter-box," said the nurse, frowning.

"Why do you always scold me when I speak of mamma before people?" asked the child. "She never scolds me, never!" Then, turning to the keeper of the shop, she said: "Please give me another meringue, madame. It is much better than the cake you are eating," she added, addressing Sigoulès.

"You are right, mademoiselle," replied the colonel, gaily. "But I have a big mouth and a terrible appetite, like the wolf that devoured the grandmamma in the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood.'"

"I have read that story, and I don't think you look at all like the wolf. But I have a good appetite, too, this morning. I have been to the Bois de Boulogne. It is a very pretty place, but I like the forest better."

"She evidently lives at Fontainebleau," was Sigoulès' mental comment.

"I should like to have stayed in the Bois all day," prattled the child; "but mamma wouldn't let me. She promised me, though, that some day I should go to the—what do you call it?—the place where the elephants and ostriches are."

"The Jardin d'Acclimatation, mademoiselle. It is the paradise of children of your age. You don't live in Paris, then?"

"I have lived here only two days. Before then we lived——"

"Bertha, you are tiring the gentleman," cried the nurse, rising.

"Not in the least," exclaimed the colonel; "I am very fond of children."

"You are very kind, sir; but she would soon tire you. She cannot be still a minute. But what else can one expect when her mother spoils her so? One of these days she will be sent to a boarding-school, where she will learn to be quiet."

"No, no," exclaimed little Bertha; "mamma has promised that my cousin Martha shall teach me as she did before. She will come to-morrow, and perhaps aunt Gabrielle will come, too. It is a long time since I saw her."

The nurse, finding it impossible to check this torrent of words, stepped to the counter to pay what was due, and the colonel took advantage of the opportunity to say to the child: "And does your papa spoil you, too, mademoiselle?"

"I have no father," was the reply. "Mamma is a widow."

"Do you remember your papa?"

"No; I don't remember him at all."

"How old are you?"

"Eight and a half; I shall be nine in September."

The nurse was evidently displeased with the numerous questions put by the gentleman, for after giving him a rather angry glance, she took the little girl's hand and said, tartly: "Come, come, that will do; your mother will be very angry with you for disobeying her."

"But I was so hungry!" pleaded the child, in extenuation of her offence.

The colonel saw them enter a cab, which proceeded in the direction of the Avenue de Wagram; then, after paying for his frugal but instructive breakfast, he leaped into a passing victoria and ordered the driver to take him to the Place de la Madeleine. There the doorkeeper, who recognised him, told him that the Baron de Lizy had just left for the country, and would be absent all day. Sigoulès went off deeply disappointed. "Paul has gone to Fontainebleau," he thought, "and heaven only knows what he will learn there. He must have lost his senses completely. Well, I shan't go after him. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

## VII.

PAUL DE LIZY was naturally anxious to learn what had become of the mysterious young girl who had been virtually his prisoner for several hours, and who had taken advantage of the confusion at the Café Américain to make her escape. He questioned the waiters, but they could tell him

nothing, and all the customers present had risen to their feet at the same moment, some of them to take part in the strife, others to look on, so that no one had noticed the girl's sudden departure. Paul was equally unsuccessful in his inquiries in the street, so he finally returned home with his brain on fire and rage in his heart.

He must seek for the solution of the mystery at Fontainebleau or in the Rue Norvins. It would be absurd, though, to go along that street, from door to door, inquiring if the inmates of the houses knew a pretty brunette, when he was ignorant of her very name; so he decided to start for Fontainebleau, but not until he had cashed his draft and sent M. de la Cadière the twenty thousand francs he owed him.

He reached the Fontainebleau station about noon, and took the railway omnibus that runs to the chateau. On alighting from it, he saw that the large public square was far more crowded than usual, and that several men who could not have been provincials—for provincials are never in a hurry—were hastening to and fro.

Paul soon perceived, moreover, that he was attracting a great deal of attention, and concluded that all strangers were regarded with suspicion, and that he had better be prudent. Determined to escape from these watchful eyes as soon as possible, the young fellow was hastening on when he saw an elderly gentleman, whose face was not unknown to him, emerge from a house near by, and come straight towards him, followed by two men who looked like detectives. "Have you arrived already? I did not expect you so soon," said the gentleman whom Paul had not quite recognised at first, but who proved to be the commissary of police he had met at the railway station in Paris on his return from Monaco.

"Were you expecting me?" inquired the baron, in great astonishment.

"Yes; the investigating magistrate insists upon hearing your deposition, and I just sent you a telegram. But you did not receive it, as you are here already. You must have foreseen that you would be summoned to-day."

"No; I had not the slightest suspicion of the fact. Indeed, I am much surprised to hear it."

"Why did you come?"

"Why, I came—out of curiosity," replied Paul, somewhat disconcerted.

"Out of curiosity?" repeated the commissary, looking at him searchingly.

"Yes! The papers are filled with details of this affair, in which I have become so strangely involved. So the idea of coming to see what the reporters style the scene of the crime occurred to me, and I am glad that I carried the idea into execution, now that I find I am needed."

"Very well, sir; will you please to accompany me to Basfroi's house: the investigating magistrate is there. You were anxious to visit it, and your wish will now be gratified, for you will probably be obliged to spend an hour or two there. It is some distance off," continued the commissary, after dismissing his subordinates. "This fellow, Basfroi, conceived the unfortunate idea of establishing himself on the very outskirts of the town, and no doubt because he carried on a rather disreputable business. In short, he was a usurer, and his Parisian clients did not like to be seen when they visited him. He has, however, paid dearly for his efforts to please them, for if he had lived in the town the murder would probably never have been committed."

A twenty minutes' walk brought them to the house where the crime had

been perpetrated. It was an unpretentious two-storey dwelling, painted white, with green shutters, and it had quite a cheerful aspect, although there was no garden connected with it. The usurer, probably, did not care for flowers. The shutters were open, and a gendarme guarded the door. "There," said the commissary, "is the window through which the assassin made his escape." And as he spoke, he pointed to a ground-floor window, some ten feet above the street. "This window is that of Basfroï's office," he continued, "the room in which the murder was committed. In the basement, below there is a kitchen and other offices, but the old fellow was a regular miser, and had his meals brought from an inn near by."

"The general impression seems to be" said the baron, "that the murderer was one of Basfroï's business acquaintances, and that he was admitted to the house by the usurer himself; in that case, why didn't he leave by the door, instead of jumping from the window?"

"Probably because Basfroï locked the door after admitting his visitor, and then concealed the key in his pocket or somewhere else. The assassin had no time to look for it, or else chose the shortest way. Perhaps he also desired to convey the impression that he had entered by the same way as he went out."

Paul found the investigating magistrate, a middle-aged man with an intelligent face and a kindly air, seated in Basfroï's arm-chair at the very desk where the usurer had been in the habit of transacting business with his clients. Behind, stood a large safe, one of the kind which cannot be opened unless the word which governs the lock is known. Near the window, a man, probably a clerk, was writing at a table; while an aged woman, dressed like a servant, was standing in front of the magistrate, who had, no doubt, just finished questioning her.

"Will you take a seat, sir?" the magistrate said to Lizy, pointing to a chair near by, and then turning to the old woman, he asked: "Well, what have you to say?"

"I have never seen this gentleman before; I am willing to take my oath to that effect."

"And you have nothing to add to your testimony?"

"Nothing, my worthy sir."

"Then you may retire."

The woman hastily availed herself of this permission, whereupon the magistrate again turned to the baron and said, politely: "The commissary tells me that you have anticipated the summons sent you by telegraph. I thank you; and add that you were sent for solely in the hope that you might perhaps be able to give further information, for it has been established beyond a doubt that you were yesterday the victim of a mistake which, fortunately, was of short duration. I know that you are an honourable man, and it is only a frank conversation that we are going to have together."

This beginning reassured Paul de Lizy, who bowed respectfully and said: "I am truly grateful to you for your courtesy, sir, and I am entirely at your service, though I confess that I do not yet see how I can be of any use to you."

"Did you notice any peculiarity in the speech of your travelling-companion the other night?"

"I did not," replied Paul, after a moment's hesitation.

"I ask this question because the woman who just left the room, and

who was formerly in Basfroi's employ, declares that a gentleman answering to the description you gave of your fellow-traveller had frequently visited her master's house; but she adds that this gentleman spoke with a very strong southern accent. Still, she has seen many other persons at the house, and I attach very little importance to what she says about the accent. However, this traveller told you that he had been compelled to fly from the vengeance of an incensed husband. What do you think of that story?"

"If I had not thought it was true, I should not have consented to the arrangement he proposed. However, on reflection it seems hard to believe that any husband could have had sufficient influence to set the entire police force in pursuit of a seducer at four o'clock in the morning. It was not this man he feared, but the police, I imagine."

"There is no doubt of it. He knew that he had been seen running away, that the crime would be discovered almost immediately, and that every arrangement would be made to arrest him in Paris on the arrival of the train. In an affair like this we can't hope to explain everything in a short investigation, but I am certain that the crime was committed by the man who entered your compartment at Melun. He must be looked for among Basfroi's acquaintances, for it is evident that Basfroi knew him; he would not have opened his door at eleven o'clock at night to a person he had never seen. From a careful examination of the scene, I believe that the crime took place as follows: Basfroi ushered his visitor into this room, gave him the chair you are now occupying, and seated himself in this arm-chair at this desk. They discussed business matters, and the conversation ended with either a reimbursement or a fresh loan. Basfroi opened the safe behind you, either to put in or take out some money, and as soon as his back was turned his visitor sprang upon him and seized him by the throat. Basfroi tried to defend himself, but he was no match for a young and vigorous man. He dropped the candelabrum he was holding, and the struggle continued in the dark, Basfroi being all the while unable to utter a cry, as the murderer had not once relaxed his hold on his throat, but had pushed him against the wall in that corner. The body was found ~~in the room~~ <sup>in the chair</sup>, which had broken beneath the weight of its burden when the murderer, certain that death had ensued, finally released his victim. All this occurred noiselessly, and probably in about five minutes' time. The legal physicians say that suffocation took place almost immediately. They also state that the death must have occurred six hours after Basfroi's last meal, and he had dined at half-past five o'clock."

"So the crime must have been committed before midnight," remarked Paul; "but it would certainly have taken the assassin more than four hours to reach the station at Melun."

"Don't forget, sir, that he went across the fields, and not by the road," rejoined the magistrate. "But to return to the subject of the murder. The assassin must have had a candle in his pocket, for the candelabrum was found under Basfroi's body, and consequently it was not used by the murderer. The safe, being open, was now at his mercy, and he took out all the gold and bank-notes it contained, excepting two bags of five-franc pieces, which he left because they were too heavy for him to carry. He also emptied a portfolio, in which Basfroi kept the promissory notes given him as security by his debtors; not a single note can be found; and it is almost certain that, as soon as he reached a place of safety, he burned them all."

"Beginning with those that bore his own signature," muttered Paul.

"Yes, I think with you that the culprit was one of Basfroi's debtors," aid the magistrate, hastily. "And I am going to try and discover the names of these debtors—no very easy task, as there is not the slightest clue to them in the few papers I can find in the desk and about the room. Basfroi was a strange creature, and seems to have kept no books, for we can find neither ledger nor day-book, although the assassin certainly would not have had time to destroy them, and certainly did not take them with him. Basfroi's only record of his business transactions seems to have been some notes made on slips of paper—notes incomprehensible to any one but himself. They consist of figures preceded by an initial, and sometimes by a hieroglyphical sign, and the wretch who killed him was probably aware of this fact. I fancy, however, that the crosses which follow some of these figures signify paid. It will be difficult to ascertain who Basfroi's clients were, as no one who had business relations with him will be inclined to boast of it. And, by the way, I must tell you, sir, that I sent for you because I hoped you might furnish me with some useful information on the subject. You belong to several clubs——"

"And I play a good deal; but I have never borrowed a single penny to pay my gambling debts."

"I know that you have a handsome fortune, of which you might make much better use—permit me to say so—but your life has always been correct, and your dealings with others strictly honourable. It is, nevertheless, true that being a frequenter of clubs where high play is in vogue, you may have heard of the Fontainebleau usurer, and also of those who were in the habit of borrowing from him."

"I heard the name of Basfroi mentioned for the first time yesterday morning, and it was spoken by that gentleman there," said Paul, pointing to the commissary, who had been playing the part of a silent spectator ever since the beginning of the interview.

"I believe you, sir. I don't, however, despair of obtaining the desired information elsewhere. There is one point, though, which you may help me in clearing up, in spite of your ignorance of Basfroi's clients and business transactions. Before this man became a usurer he was in business with a Monsieur Plantier, formerly a member of the Chamber of Commerce, but who died a few years ago, leaving a handsome fortune and a charming daughter. The latter, prior to her father's death, married a certain Count de Marcenac, but she is now a widow; at least, such is the information I received from Paris this morning."

"I have the honour of knowing Madame de Marcenac," replied Paul, satisfied that he would be obliged to make this confession some day or other, and anxious to have it over as soon as possible.

"Indeed! Then you can give me some information about her; and your opinion will have great weight with me. What do you think of the Countess de Marcenac?"

"She is universally admired and respected."

"Yes, I know she bears an excellent reputation. She is very rich, and she entertains a great deal. How does it happen that she is still a widow? Report says that she is young and pretty; and with her fortune, she must have plenty of suitors."

"You ask me, sir, a rather delicate question, which I am utterly unable to answer."

"Is it not because she kept up her acquaintance with her father's

former partner, in spite of the disreputable business he was carrying on? An honourable man would certainly think twice before marrying the intimate friend of a usurer."

The thrust made Paul turn pale. "I can only say," he replied, rather drily, "that Madame de Marcenac never mentioned Basfroï's name to me. I saw her only yesterday, and I assure you that she was even ignorant of Basfroï's assassination."

"You might have apprised her of the fact by telling her about the unfortunate mistake which caused you so much inconvenience."

"I did not think of it. I had no reason to suppose that she knew the man."

"Then you were not aware that she visited him at Fontainebleau nearly every week?"

"No, I was not."

"The old servant I just questioned states that Madame de Marcenac often came here at about four o'clock, and spent an hour or two before returning to Paris. Now this man, Basfroï, although he had been her father's partner, was not the kind of person whose acquaintance Madame de Marcenac would have cultivated had she not had some special object. But in the safe pillaged by the murderer a single paper has been found, and that paper is a will by which Basfroï bequeaths his entire property to Mademoiselle Bertha Plantier; and the strangest thing about it all is, that this will was found in the same portfolio from which all the notes had been extracted. What inference do you draw from that? Why did the murderer leave that very paper, and that one alone, so as to ensure the execution of the last wishes of a man whom he had just strangled?"

"It was not a precaution, probably, but an oversight," said Paul, although his heart sunk within him. Bertha M. Basfroï's heiress! Bertha interested in the death of this usurer! This, then, was what M. de la Cadière had meant by his threats.

"A very strange oversight, you must admit," replied the magistrate; "for the assassin evidently examined the entire contents of the portfolio. This will was in an envelope, and the envelope had been torn open; so the murderer must have known it was there, and have taken care to return it to its place after examining it. How do you explain his solicitude for the interests of the legatee, whose name he must, at least, have known, as he had read the will? I don't go so far as to assert that the Countess de Marcenac had Basfroï assassinated, so that she might come into possession of his property more quickly, but——"

"She has nearly a million francs of her own. No one can imagine for an instant that she would commit such a crime in order to obtain possession of property which must be reduced to a mere trifle by the robbery that has just been committed."

"There you are very much mistaken! Basfroï has more than two million francs deposited at the Bank of France. Madame de Marcenac is rich, I know; but that is no proof of her innocence. Her good name is a much more effectual protector than her fortune."

"I don't believe she has the slightest suspicion that she is this man's heiress."

"In that, also, you are mistaken; but that is of very little consequence."

"May not the murderer have left the will so as to throw suspicion upon the countess?" asked Paul, scarcely knowing what to say.



"This is a new view of the matter," replied the magistrate. "It really had not struck me before; but it is not impossible. The assassin may, indeed, have left the will for the express purpose of misleading the authorities. However this may be, we must look for the culprit among Madame de Marcenac's friends—or among her enemies. I am sure that you understand me, and that you will do all in your power to second my efforts. I will not detain you much longer, but I should like to show you Basfroi's will. There are certain passages in it the meaning of which I do not clearly comprehend, and which I should like to submit to you, for, as you know Madame de Marcenac so well, you may perhaps understand them better than I do. Basfroi had a very strong affection for his former partner's daughter, and he often thought of her, for the word that opened his safe was Mademoiselle Plantier's Christian name."

It was true; the six letters equivalent to the "open sesame" of the "Arabian Nights"—the six letters engraved upon the copper knobs on the door of the safe, formed the name of Bertha.

"Here is the will," said the magistrate, taking the document from the safe. "With your permission I will read it to you. 'I, Jerome Basfroi, being of sound mind, and wishing to provide for the consequences of a marriage which to my great regret I aided in effecting, name as my sole legatee Bertha Plantier, the daughter of my former partner, Joseph Plantier, and devise to her any property of which I may die possessed, for her sole use and benefit, independent of her husband; but subject to an annuity of twelve thousand francs to be paid to Monsieur Paul Chardin, a retired merchant, residing in the Rue des Lions Saint Paul. If, contrary to my apprehensions, Bertha Plantier, Countess de Marcenac, should still be wealthy at the date of my death, I hope she will not refuse my bequest, but make such disposition of it as has been agreed upon between us, and as her judgment may dictate; and I here express my approval, in advance, of anything she may see fit to do. I have only distant relatives, to whom I owe nothing, not even good will; so that my legatee need feel no scruples about accepting a fortune which her father greatly assisted me in making, and which consists of certain sums of money which I have deposited at the Bank of France, and such securities and bonds as may be found in my safe after my death. Done at Paris, this, the 14th day of July, 1876.'

"You notice that the legatee is allowed the utmost liberty," remarked the magistrate; "but everything seems to indicate that, in case the countess is wealthy at the time of Basfroi's demise, she is expected to give the legacy to some person whose name is not mentioned, or to use it for that person's benefit. Can you give me any clue to this person's identity?"

"None whatever," replied Paul. "I don't think—indeed, I know that Madame de Marcenac has no near relatives, and I cannot imagine who that person can be, unless it were one of the clients Basfroi ruined, which is not at all probable."

"Then I shall be obliged to question her upon this point, as well as upon several others," replied the magistrate, coldly. "And now can you give me any information concerning this Monsieur Chardin, to whom an annuity of twelve thousand francs is bequeathed?"

"Yes, I know him; he is a very respectable man—a retired merchant."

"Is it to him that she is to give this fortune, in case she does not need it?"

"I think not. He lives very plainly, but he is in comfortable circumstances, and does not need any legacy. I may add, that I met him yester-

day, and informed him of Basfroi's tragical death. I was not aware that the usurer was one of his friends, but mentioned the murder as I might have mentioned any bit of news."

"I will make a note of that. Now, I trust you will maintain absolute silence respecting what has been said in this room. You might be tempted to speak to Madame de Marcenac about her inheritance, and——"

"You need have no fears of that. It is not likely that I shall ever see Madame de Marcenac again."

"And why?" asked the magistrate, quickly. "Do you think she is guilty?"

"No, a thousand times, no; but the fact that her name is mixed up in this affair is sufficient reason why I should not visit her at present."

"I can but approve of your decision, and I see I may rely upon your discretion. Good-day, baron; I will not detain you longer."

Paul thereupon rose up, bowed coldly, and departed.

### VIII.

ON leaving the usurer's house, Paul de Lizy resolved to continue his search for the cottage which M. de la Cadière had described to him. It was the dinner hour, and the square was much less crowded than when he had crossed it, with the commissary of police, an hour or two before; still, he avoided it, and took a roundabout way to reach the road leading from the station. He found it deserted, so that he was able to satisfy himself that no spy was on his track, for one could see a long distance, and neither vehicle nor pedestrian was in sight.

Following the viscount's directions he took the first road leading to the left—the Rue des Sorbiers—and a few minutes' walk brought him to the house. It was one of those villas so common in the suburbs of Paris. Although small, it was built in a rather fantastic style, with miniature turrets and towers, and its general appearance and carefully-kept grounds indicated that it had been constantly occupied. Still, every shutter was now closed; and when Paul looked through the gate he could see no one in the garden, which was adorned with freshly-watered flowers. The house seemed to be entirely deserted. This was a great disappointment to Paul, who had hoped to find some one there from whom he could obtain some information. He had intended to inquire if the house was not to let, and even hoped to obtain permission to examine it. He rang once, twice; but no one responded. There could be no further doubt—the house was empty; and he was on the point of going away, a prey to the most maddening uncertainty, when, seized with a paroxysm of jealous rage, he suddenly said to himself: "I will enter in spite of everything." He finally resolved to scale the garden gate, and did so without much difficulty. Then he took a winding-path which led to the back of the house. Here also the doors and windows were closed, and a profound silence reigned around. Near a bench, however, Paul perceived a tiny watering-pot, half-full of water, and a rake of too fairy-like proportions for a gardener's use. "What if I should be mistaken?" he murmured; "what if this should be the home of some respectable family, instead of a lover's rendezvous. These gardening implements are toys, and here are piles of sand which are evidently the work of childish hands."

He went straight to a door embowered in luxuriant creepers, but found

neither bell nor knocker, which was not strange, as visitors would scarcely enter by way of the garden. Almost without thinking, Paul placed his hand upon the knob; it turned, and to his great astonishment the door opened. He hesitated for a moment, unable to make up his mind to enter; but his curiosity finally got the better of him, and he crossed the threshold and found himself in a hall, at the end of which there was a staircase. He had not closed the house door behind him, and he could see plainly enough. Through a partially-open door, a few steps further on, he caught a glimpse of a laundry with some linen drying upon the lines. Opposite this there was a real country kitchen, with a large open fireplace, and pieces of bacon hanging from the ceiling.

Paul felt more and more reassured, but all the same he resolved to explore the house thoroughly, now he was there. There was a candle on the table, and as he always carried matches in his pocket—being a smoker—he would have sufficient light to visit the floors above without being obliged to open the shutters. Before starting upon his tour of exploration, however, he went out and unbolted the garden-gate, so that he might have plenty of time to make his escape in case the family returned while he was in the house; and then, candle in hand, he proceeded to the floor above. He there found two very plainly-furnished rooms. In one of them there was a curtainless bed, a writing-table, and a few cane-seated chairs. In the other, there was only some ponderous oaken chests and wardrobes. “Who can sleep in this barn?” wondered Paul; “certainly not the master of the house, much less the mistress. The children, perhaps. No; there is only a single straw pallet, upon which my valet would scorn to sleep. Let us take a look up-stairs.”

Overhead there were two rooms communicating with one another, and each opening out of the hall, as on the floor below, but they were much more tastefully furnished. The large one was hung with grey paper, and the floor was covered with expensive matting. Upon the white marble mantel shelf there were two handsome Japanese vases, and between them a bronze statuette representing the Florentine singer, which is so familiar to us all. In one corner stood a handsome rosewood *escritoire*. A pretty cabinet, two or three low chairs covered with tapestry, and a bamboo flower-stand full of plants, composed the furniture. It was an apartment suitable for any refined lady, and Paul's suspicions would have returned to him had he not seen in one corner of the room a tiny bed, with white muslin curtains and a diminutive pillow. On the wall, near the foot of this bed, there was an exquisitely carved ivory crucifix; at the head, the portrait of a young and pretty woman, whom Lizy had never seen, so that he did not stop to examine it. The adjoining room was evidently a school-room, for the table was thickly strewn with school-books, ink-stands, copy-books, pens and pencils.

“What a strange house!” thought Paul. “There is no drawing or dining room in it, and one would swear that it was only occupied by a young girl and her nurse. Certainly, Bertha could never have come here with an evil intention, if she came at all, which is doubtful, for that fellow *La Cadière* may have lied to me after all.”

While engaged in these reflections, Paul's eyes fell upon a photograph in a richly-wrought gilt frame, which stood upon the table, and on approaching to examine it more carefully, he saw that it was a portrait of *Madame de Marcenac*, but *Madame de Marcenac* in her youthful days, attired in a short dress, and with her luxuriant blonde hair worn in two

long braided coils. This discovery threw him once more into a state of intense anxiety and dread, for it was no longer possible to doubt but what the countess paid frequent visits to the villa. And what could be the object of these visits? A child and her nurse were evidently the only inmates of the house. Bertha was too old to seek the companionship of a child. Was the child's mother a friend of hers? In that case, why did she conceal her visits, and why had she never personally alluded to her intimacy with a person who lived so far away?

While Paul was endeavouring to discover some plausible explanation of this mystery, he was startled by a loud and peremptory ring at the front-door bell. Approaching one of the windows that looked out upon the road, he raised it cautiously, slightly opened a shutter, and looked out. It was a man who had rung the bell, a tall, broad-shouldered man, very well dressed, and carrying a heavy cane. Paul could only see the top of his hat, and the waxed ends of his long moustaches, which he wore in true military style. "The lover!" he muttered, between his teeth; "it is the lover who has come to meet Bertha! She is late; he thinks she is here, and feels impatient at being obliged to wait at the door."

Another furious ring at the bell made Paul forget his anger and surprise, and wonder that the lover should display so little caution. He began to wonder, too, what course he himself had better pursue. He could not leave the house without being seen, for the man below seemed determined to remain; besides, he felt no desire to leave. He was almost certain Madame de Marcenac would soon appear, that she would enter the house with her lover, and he wished she might there find him—the betrothed husband whom she had so shamefully deceived. But he was also resolved to have proofs which she could not refute; to hear some familiar words, to witness some tell-tale caress. But to see and hear the culprits without being seen, he would be obliged to conceal himself. Looking around the room in search of a hiding-place, he espied a door which he had not previously noticed. He opened it, and it proved to be the entrance to a closet. The partition was so thin that there would not be the slightest difficulty in hearing anything that persons might say in the adjoining room; and, by removing the key, it became an easy matter to watch their movements. Having decided upon this retreat in case of need Paul hastened back to his post of observation, leaving the closet-door half open.

The man below had taken a bunch of keys from his pocket, and was now engaged in trying them in the lock of the street door, and he finally succeeded in finding one that opened it.

Paul retreated to his hiding-place, but he had no sooner shut himself up in it than he regretted the step. He really blushed that he had concealed himself to watch and listen; and besides, what if this man were the owner or tenant of the house? In that case the new-comer would have a perfect right to treat him as a burglar. Unfortunately, these reflections came too late. There was no longer time to beat a retreat. Paul kept perfectly quiet. He had extinguished the candle brought from the kitchen, and so found himself in complete darkness. Soon he heard the stairs creak under the heavy tread of the visitor, who, in another minute, pushed the bed-room door violently open. A round oath followed, as the new-comer knocked against some article of furniture in the dim light; but he made his way to the window, and flung open the shutters, admitting a flood of light into the apartment. Paul had taken one step in espionage,

and it was not worth while hesitating over the second ; so he applied his eye to the key-hole of the closet door.

The new-comer was exactly opposite this door, so that Paul could see him plainly. He was considerably older than he had appeared from the window. He was about fifty years of age, and did not resemble an officer in the least, in spite of his waxed moustache, for he also wore a full beard, streaked with grey, which imparted a rather forbidding expression to his countenance. He had a florid face, a large nose, and deep-set eyes, overhung with shaggy brows.

This gentleman, glanced around him, and then approached the bed, and Paul perceived that he wore the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour in his button-hole. After thrusting his cane into the bed several times, as if he longed to wreak his vengeance on the child who had reposed there, he perceived the portrait of the strange lady and, tearing it down from the wall, trampled it under his feet. His features were distorted, and his eyes flashed ominously. He had evidently recognised the lady represented in the portrait, and the lady was no doubt his wife.

Paul could hardly restrain his joy. He understood the situation at last. Bertha, being an old friend of the unfaithful wife, had probably taken an interest in the welfare of the child who was deprived of a mother's watchful care. Her frequent visits to Fontainebleau were thus explained. She was innocent, and he was anxious to kneel at her feet and humbly implore her forgiveness for having so deeply wronged her by his suspicions. The husband seemed to have no idea of visiting the rest of the house, but began stalking up and down the room, flourishing his cane like a sabre, launching forth frightful imprecations against his wife, and occasionally going to the window and looking down the road as if watching for some one to arrive. "He knows that she is coming, and he is waiting for her," Paul said to himself. "If she does come, I shall witness a frightful scene. He is capable of killing her ; but I will prevent that, since Bertha has seen fit to take her under her protection."

The husband continued his furious promenade, but after going to the window once more, and looking out, he hastily drew back, and, instead of resuming his walk, he retreated to the end of the room, where he remained silent and motionless. Suddenly a sound made Paul start. Some one had closed the outer door below, and, at last, a light footfall was heard on the stairs. The husband did not move a muscle, but Paul could hear him panting like an enraged tiger. The sound of the footsteps on the stairs now suddenly ceased. The person who was coming up seemed to hesitate, as if afraid, and a trembling feminine voice called out—

"Bertha, are you there?"

The name pierced Paul's heart like a knife. So it was Madame de Marcenac that the new comer was seeking. The idea that the child might also be named Bertha did not occur to him. The man must have recognised the voice, for he uttered a growl of rage, but he did not stir. He was waiting. The door of the room had been left open, and the lady, after pausing for a second on the threshold, entered. She went straight to the bed, without perceiving the man who was watching her, and Paul could not see her face, as her back was turned toward him. In figure she did not resemble the countess, although she seemed to be about the same age. Before she had time to make another movement, a hand fell upon her shoulder and forced her upon her knees. "I have you at last !" exclaimed the man, savagely.

"Mercy, mercy!" faltered the woman.

"What brings you here?" And, receiving no answer, he thundered :  
 "Speak, or I will strangle you!"

"I thought I should find one of my friends here," she gasped.

"You lie! You expected to find your daughter!"

"My daughter! I have no daughter, as you know very well."

"I know that you have concealed from me the birth of the bastard that you have had the audacity to rear here in my house."

"I swear that this is false!"

"Oh! take as many oaths as you like; one or two, more or less, will make no difference to you. You have systematically deceived me for ten years—but you will deceive me no longer, for you are about to die!"

"You mean to kill me?"

"Oh! not now; not until you have told me where the child is, and the name of her father—your lover."

"Jacques, you are mad! I have no lover. May God punish me if I am not speaking the truth!"

"I will punish you myself; but I will have a full confession first."

"What can I confess? I am not guilty."

"Listen!" shouted the man, flinging her upon a low chair where she sank back, half-fainting; "I will not condemn you without a hearing, and without telling you all that is in my heart. I will remind you of the past, to see if you are still capable of realising how vile you are. But no, you have ceased to blush; you have sunk too low for that."

"What have I done?"

"What have you done? You have destroyed the life of a man who rescued you from want and misery. What were you when I married you a dozen years ago? An orphan, reared by charity in a boarding-school, where you had been retained out of pity as an assistant teacher, and whence you would have been driven sooner or later if you had not met an honest man to save you from the depths of disgrace into which you would have inevitably fallen. What would you be now but for me?" A moan was the only response. "I fell in love with you, unfortunately," continued the husband. "Like a fool I allowed my heart to be touched by your unhappy condition. I was young; I had a brilliant future before me, and I fondly dreamed of a wife who would be my faithful and devoted companion. I thought I had found what I was seeking, but I long since discovered that I was mistaken."

"Jacques, your anger blinds you; you forget that you have not addressed a single reproach to me since our marriage."

"Because I was blind. I allowed myself to be deceived by your protestations of affection. But my eyes have been opened——"

"Who has slandered me?"

"I forbid you to question me. I have not yet finished. I had quite a fortune when I married you. It was enough for me, I cared very little for money; but I wished to give you every luxury, so I asked for leave of absence, and went to the Caucasus to superintend the laying of a railway line there. I remained there two years, and made a deal of money. On my return I built this house, where we were to live, but where you would never reside, even during my absence. You had your reasons; I know them now. Then followed my contracts in Cochinchina and Mexico. Seven of the twelve years of my married life have been spent out of France, for although we had abundant means, I would

not relax in my efforts until you had a chateau and a handsome establishment in Paris."

"I never asked you for any of these."

"No; but you were glad to accept all I could give you. I now own large property in Paris and in Seine-et-Marne. I have given up risking my life in unhealthy climates; I have abandoned the arduous duties of a civil engineer; I am the director of a railway company. I belong to the Legion of Honour; I am rich. But one thing more is necessary to make me happy, a wife who would return a little of the love I have lavished upon her, and abstain from dragging my good name through the mire."

"Jacques, I beseech you——"

"I cannot help admiring your audacity," continued the husband, bitterly. "You actually dared, during one of my stays abroad, to let this villa to some woman—probably your daughter's nurse. It was very convenient for you; Fontainebleau is not far from Bois-le-Roi. I troubled myself no more about whom I had for a tenant than I did about visiting the house. I thought so little about it that I had any amount of trouble in finding the spare key of it. I did not think I should be obliged to use it, for I knew the house was occupied; but there was no one here to admit me. I was told that you would be here to-day; so I stayed in Paris all night for the express purpose of throwing you off your guard, and you have fallen into the trap I set for you."

"So you have received an anonymous letter, and you believe the slanders of some coward who dared not sign his name."

"It would seem that I was right, however, as you are here. And how could I doubt the truth of the accusation, when only two nights ago your lover narrowly escaped capture at the chateau. Yes, my keeper—on making his round at two o'clock in the morning—saw a man leap over the hedge and run across the fields. He fired at him, but missed his aim."

"The man was probably a thief who thought the chateau unoccupied, and who fled on hearing a noise. I was asleep and did not hear the shot; you yourself awoke me when you returned from Paris by the first train."

"All this has nothing to do with the subject," said the husband, brusquely. "You cannot deny that you have a daughter? How old is she? When did you dishonour me? Was it before our marriage or while I was at Tiflis? I am determined to know all."

"I have no daughter," murmured the wife.

"You deny it still? You forget that it will be an easy matter for me to bring her into your presence. She is not here, but she will soon return with the woman who has charge of her; and I have a right to question them since they are my tenants. Speak, I will spare your life, perhaps, if you tell me the truth." There was a pause, broken only by the woman's sobs. "I am waiting," said the husband, at last, "and I swear that if you persist in this silence, I shall show you no mercy; as for your accomplice, I shall have no difficulty in finding him."

"I have no fear of that," replied the wife, with an evident effort. "Yes; there is a child here, which I have helped in concealing. I ought to have told you this long ago, but the secret was not mine, and I dared not confide it to you. This child is the daughter of a school-friend who has been unfortunate, and who was so kind to me when I was alone in the world that——"

"Tell me her name."

Paul de Lizy's heart throbbed wildly when he heard the husband order

his wife to reveal the mother's name. Something told him that she would give the name of Bertha de Marcenac, but, contrary to his expectations, she replied: "I cannot; she has trusted me, and I have no right to betray her. Kill me, if you choose, but I will not disclose her name."

"Because she does not exist; if she did, you would not hesitate, for you know that I would guard this pretended secret faithfully. The falsehoods you are inventing have not even a semblance of truth. Confess, I tell you. There is no other way to save yourself and your daughter."

The lady did not reply. Her head drooped, and her pallor and immobility convinced Paul that she felt that she was lost, and longed for a speedy termination of her sufferings. He could hardly believe that she was sacrificing herself for a friend; it seemed to him evident that, after vainly attempting to impute the fault to another, she understood that slander would be useless, and had prepared herself for her fate. However, the baron was even more firmly resolved to protect her from her husband's vengeance, whether it was just or unjust, and so with his eye at the key-hole, and his hand upon the lock, he watched the man's every movement. The woman must have been very charming in her youth, but sorrow, rather than years, had greatly impaired her beauty. Her cheeks were sunken, there were deep blue circles under her eyes, and as she sat there with her head bowed upon her breast, and her hands clasped in her lap, she seemed the very personification of hopeless grief.

"Let us put an end to this," said the husband, harshly; "I will give you five minutes for reflection." And as he spoke he drew a large revolver from his pocket.

Paul had so far only half believed in the murderous intentions expressed by this incensed husband; but now the situation had become serious. The deadly weapon was aimed at the poor, defenceless creature; and the husband's stern visage expressed implacable determination. Moreover, he had taken out his watch, and was counting each second as it passed. "The man is mad!" thought Paul. "He will kill her if I don't interfere. I must manage to disarm him before he can use the revolver."

The seconds were rapidly flitting by, and Paul was nerving himself for struggle, when he saw the husband suddenly start, and then assume a listening attitude. "He has heard the outer door open," thought Paul. "Some one else is coming. She is saved. He will not dare to kill his wife in the presence of a witness; but who can it be?" The culprit had also heard the sound, for her face suddenly changed, its expression of resignation giving place to one of anxiety.

Meanwhile, the husband had stealthily approached the top of the stairs, where he remained a moment listening to the sounds which rose from below—sounds which Paul, in his hiding-place, could not hear very distinctly. However, a moment later the husband returned and hastily exclaimed: "I forbid you to move or call out!"

"Who is it?" she murmured.

"Your daughter and her nurse, probably. I hear two persons talking below. They have entered one of the rooms down-stairs. They are evidently looking for you, but as they will not find you there they will come up here. I wish to witness your meeting. Children don't know how to act a part, and your daughter will throw her arms round your neck and call you mamma. I would not spoil this touching scene by my presence on any consideration, so I shall go into the adjoining room. The door is open, and I shall not lose sight of you for a second. If you make a gesture,



or any sign whatever, to warn the girl that I am here, I will fire at you, and I shall not miss my mark."

The unfortunate woman had not strength to reply, but remained motionless, with wildly staring eyes, the picture of terror and despair. Paul was equally perplexed. One can stay a man's hand, but one cannot arrest a bullet in its flight, and the husband was now too far off for the baron to intervene successfully.

Soon light footsteps came swiftly up the stairs, and a moment after, a young woman whom Paul instantly recognised appeared upon the threshold. "What, you here!" exclaimed a clear voice—that of the young person who had so unceremoniously deserted the baron at the *Café Américain*—in one word, Madame de Marcenac's messenger. "We did not expect to find you here," she continued. "I was not able to warn you of Bertha's departure, but godmother will explain everything satisfactorily. Why, how pale you are! Are you ill? Why do you not answer me? What is the matter with you?"

And as the poor woman, condemned to silence, made no effort to speak for fear of disobeying her husband's orders, the girl ran to the top of the stairs, calling out: "Godmother, come quick. Madame Larmor is here, and I think she is going to faint."

It was Bertha de Marcenac who came running up the stairs in response to this summons, and who, as soon as she saw her friend, hastened to her, took her hands, and cried: "What is the matter? Why are you so pale? And why do I find you here? I did not tell you I would come to-day. But I understand; you thought Bertha was still here. Gabrielle, why don't you answer me?" continued Madame de Marcenac. "Do you hear me? Speak, I beseech you!"

"She is suffocating!" cried the girl. "See how she gasps for breath!"

"Open all the windows, those in the school-room first; a draught of air will bring her to."

The girl, eager to obey, darted into the adjoining room and found herself face to face with a strange man who seized her roughly by the arm. The cry of terror which she uttered brought Madame de Marcenac to the rescue. The countess, although considerably ~~startled~~ <sup>surprised</sup>, was in the presence of mind, but asked in a firm voice, although with considerable inward trepidation: "Who are you? and by what right are you here?"

"I am that lady's husband, and this house belongs to me."

"Monsieur Larmor!" stammered the countess.

"Yes; and it is now my turn to question you. Who are you?"

"I am the Countess de Marcenac, and Gabrielle's friend."

"You, a friend of my wife's? I have never seen you before."

"That is probably your own fault, sir. I reside in Paris, in the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré."

"Your pretended friend has never mentioned you to me. When did your acquaintance begin?"

"We were educated at the same boarding-school, though I left it before she did. I was not in Paris at the time of your marriage, and Gabrielle and I lost sight of each other for several years. When I met her again you had just started on a long journey—to Russia, I think. In the meantime, I, too, had married."

"Ah! you are married?"

"I am a widow, sir; and free to do what I like, and go where I please."

"And you take advantage of this freedom to visit my wife, not at her residence, but at a place which she only frequents by stealth."

"Excuse me, sir; I did not come to see Gabrielle, as you ought to know, after hearing me express my astonishment at finding her here. I simply came, because I am your tenant. You are ignorant of the fact, perhaps; but it is nevertheless true that I have paid rent for this house during several years."

"What use do you make of it?"

"I use it as a resting-place when I have business at Fontainebleau. I should say I *have* used it, for I was about to write to Gabrielle and ask her to take possession of the property, though my lease does not expire for two years to come."

These answers were made with a readiness and clearness which seemed to furnish the husband with abundant food for reflection, and which reduced poor Paul to the greatest perplexity. There was a long pause; then the husband, seeing that he must break the ice, looked Madame de Marcenac full in the face, and said: "Madame, this is not a question of your lease, but of my honour."

"Good heavens! you alarm me," said the countess, smiling. "How can your honour be involved?"

"Where is the child that lived here?"

"The child—what child?"

"Oh! don't try to deceive me. You don't live in this house. You may have rented it, and may come here very often; but it has been occupied for a long time by a woman and a little girl. Don't deny it. I am certain of it; and I can prove it, if you like, by the testimony of several residents of Fontainebleau."

"I see that I did not fully understand the kind of examination to which you propose subjecting me."

"You will soon understand. I do not think that either you or your friend deserve much consideration at my hands. You inquired why I came here. I came because I know that my wife has a daughter whose ~~under the charge of a servant or governess.~~ <sup>under the charge of a servant or governess.</sup>"

"And you believe such a piece of slander? Who can have told you such a thing?"

"That does not concern you; let me finish what I have to say. I was told that I should find my wife here to-day. I came. She was not here. I waited for her. She came in, and not knowing I was here, she began calling her daughter by the name of Bertha."

"Which is my name, sir, and it was probably me that Gabrielle was calling."

"No; she confessed that there was a child here, but as I was about to kill her, she invented a falsehood to save her life. She dared to tell me that this child was not hers, but one that a friend had confided to her care—a friend who had been unfortunate. This seems improbable; still, it may be true. I bade her tell me the name of her friend—"

"And did she comply with your request?"

"No; she refused, on the plea that she could not reveal a secret which did not belong to her, and which would injure another woman's reputation."

"And I honour her, sir, for keeping the secret."

"Yes; it would be very commendable, if her story were true; but I do not believe a word of it."

"What if I told you that what she said is true?"

"Then, do you know the mother? Tell me her name."

"Why should I tell you her name? I am equally unwilling to betray an unfortunate woman who has confided in me."

"Very well; I know, then, what I shall do."

"And, pray, what will you do?"

"I shall kill my wife!" said M. Larmor, coldly; "I should have done so before this if you had not arrived. I thought it was the child returning, and as I intend to kill her, too, I waited. I shall now only wait till you are gone," he added, pointing grimly to the door.

Madame de Marcenac turned pale, but she drew herself up proudly and looked him full in the face. "I shall not go," was her calm response, "and you will kill no one, for I am not your wife, and you have no right to punish me. Gabrielle is innocent, and so that you may no longer doubt it, I confess that the child you dare to threaten with death is *mine*!"

This was a most crushing blow for Paul de Lizy. Although he was, in a measure, prepared for it, it was none the less hard to bear; and in his despair he could scarcely resist a wild impulse to take part in a scene which was already sufficiently deplorable.

"I thank Gabrielle for having guarded my secret at the peril of her life," continued Madame de Marcenac. "Her friendship for me has been such that I could expect no less from her; but I should be the basest of creatures if I abused her unselfish kindness under circumstances like these. You may do as you like with my reputation, it is at your mercy; everything is of little moment, provided I can save your wife, who has nothing to reproach herself with, except, perhaps, her goodness to me."

"A mere assertion of this kind is not sufficient," growled the husband.

"You must prove what you say."

"Very well; I will be more explicit. After I left the school where Gabrielle still remained, I fell a victim to the wiles of a man whose true character I afterwards discovered, and whom I could not and would not marry. I confessed everything to my father, who took me to Italy, where I spent a year. On my return, I entrusted the child to your old friend who was still at school?"

"And you entrusted the child to your old friend who was still at school? I should be an idiot if I believed such an improbable story as this."

"Let me explain myself, if you please. The child, a daughter, was sent to a village near Vendôme, to be cared for by a woman there. My father had forgiven me upon condition that he should never see my daughter, and it was only at long intervals that I was allowed to visit her. You can imagine what I suffered. The day came when I received an offer of marriage. I wished to confess everything to my suitor, but my father objected."

"Is your father still living?" inquired M. Larmor.

"No, sir," replied the countess, coldly; "I lost him six years ago. You cannot question him. Allow me to go on with my story, if you please. So I did not confess my fault to my husband. I had just been married when I met Gabrielle, of whom I had lost sight for a couple of years, although we had not ceased to love each other like sisters. I told her of my unfortunate situation, and she took pity on me and offered to assist me. I longed to see my daughter. But how? She was thirty leagues from Paris. I should have had to ask my husband's consent to make such a journey; and this I dared not do. You were then in the Caucasus, and you had left your property in your wife's charge. Gabrielle told me that

you owned, at Fontainebleau, a country house which was unoccupied at the time, but which you desired to let. I could have no better place to meet my child, for I had an excuse for frequent visits to Fontainebleau as my father's former partner resided there—a man whom my husband knew, and whom he did not object to my visiting, although all intercourse between them had ceased."

Madame de Marcenac was talking loud enough for her friend to hear every word distinctly; and Madame Larmor had raised her head, and was listening attentively to the confession which exculpated her completely. Paul was overcome with grief and rage.

"I leased your house for nine years," continued the countess; "but leased it under a feigned name. A worthy woman who had been in my parents' employ in former years, signed the lease—you can satisfy yourself of this by looking at the document—the name is Jeanne Barbin. She promised to take charge of my daughter, and never let the child out of her sight—a promise she has faithfully kept. Shortly afterwards, I had the good fortune to meet a young teacher, a godchild of mine, who was willing to assume entire charge of Bertha's education. Here she is: question her, if you like. Mademoiselle Martha Morgan will tell you that she returned from Paris this morning, and that she has just come from the railway station where she went to meet me." The girl thus appealed to was much more agitated and embarrassed than her mistress, and merely replied by a bow of assent. "Can you blame Gabrielle for having assisted me in the trying position in which I was placed?" continued the countess; "and is her domestic happiness to be ruined for ever on account of the service she so generously rendered me? It would be far more just for me to bear the penalty of my fault by proclaiming everywhere what I have just confessed to you."

"You are not my wife, and your conduct does not concern me," was M. Larmor's surly response.

"Are you satisfied that Gabrielle is innocent?"

"I shall be, perhaps, when I have seen the child. I am waiting for that."

"You will wait in vain. Bertha will not return to Fontainebleau, for she is in Paris—in the charge of Jeanne Barbin, the woman who has brought her up since her infancy."

"Why have you taken her away?"

"Because she is now old enough to be learning something, and needs teachers she cannot have here. Moreover, I am now free, as I am a widow; and I can see my child as often as I like. I cannot acknowledge her publicly, but I want her near me."

"How old is she?"

"Nine years old."

"I was at Tiflis then, and remained there more than a year," murmured the husband, thoughtfully. "My wife might have given birth to the child without my knowledge."

"But do you think she would have been rash enough to install her little girl in a house which belonged to you?"

This question seemed to make an impression on M. Larmor, and dispelled any doubts which may have lingered in poor Paul's mind. "If you have taken your daughter to Paris, why are you here to-day?" inquired M. Larmor.

"You don't seem to have noticed that we have not finished moving," responded Madame de Marcenac. "Not a single article of furniture has

been taken away, and, in fact, I intend to leave everything here as long as the villa remains unlet; but I wanted my daughter's books, and a few other trifles, such as portraits, for instance. You will see my photograph on the table in the school-room, if you take the trouble to look there."

"I am surprised that you forgot to take it when you came for your daughter."

"But I did not come for Bertha. Jeanne Barbin brought her to me; and, as she left unexpectedly, she forgot almost everything."

"Unexpectedly?"

"Yes; I decided very suddenly to send for my daughter. You are probably anxious to know the cause of this hasty decision on my part, and I am perfectly willing to tell you. My father's former partner was foully murdered near here on the night before last; and the news filled me with unspeakable terror. Feeling that Bertha was no longer safe in this lonely house, I sent for her at once; and I have such a horror of the town now, that I have made up my mind never to set foot here again."

"I am sure that what she is now saying is a falsehood," thought Paul. "She was ignorant of Basfroi's murder at six o'clock last night, and yet at midnight she gave a letter to the girl who calls her 'godmother,' with instructions to deliver it to the child's nurse who was already in the Rue Norvins, at Montmartre."

"But why do I find my wife here?" persisted the husband.

"Because I wrote and told her I should be here to-day. I begged her to be sure and come, as this visit would probably be my last, and I had a host of things to say to her. She is very fond of little Bertha, and I wished to explain why I had taken the child away. Moreover, for I may as well make a clean breast of it, I intended to inform her of my intention of putting an end to my false position, and to tell her that I intended to visit her publicly at Bois le Roi some day, when I should be sure of meeting you there, our long friendship making it quite natural for me to desire her husband's acquaintance, while she has always spoken of you in such complimentary terms that I felt no fear of being unkindly received. I trust that you will not insist upon a rupture of our friendly connection—one which I have no longer any reason for concealing. Things have turned out very differently to what I expected, and I do not regret it, as I have been able to exonerate Gabrielle; for I am sure you will give no further credence to the base slanders which deceived you for a moment. Unfortunately your poor wife has suffered too much already; for, see, she has not yet recovered from the shock. Have compassion on her, sir. Tell her, I beseech you—tell her in my presence, that you no longer believe her guilty, and that you no longer doubt her fidelity. Tell her that you love her as she has never ceased to love you; and that not the slightest shadow of even a passing cloud shall remain between you. Do this, I entreat you, for the sake of one who has had sufficient confidence in you to place her reputation at your mercy."

The husband did not reply to this touching appeal, but he showed unmistakable signs of emotion. His convictions were evidently shaken, although he was not entirely convinced. A faint ray of hope illumined the despairing heart of the accused woman, though she did not yet dare to raise her eyes to her husband's face. Indeed, she scarcely ventured to bestow a stealthy glance of gratitude upon Madame de Marcenac. After a fresh pause, which was equally trying to everybody present, M. Larmor

stepped hastily forward, and said abruptly to the countess: "Do you believe in God?"

"Yes," replied the countess, steadily.

"Then you would not swear falsely, for Providence punishes perjurers."

"I have never told a falsehood; and nothing in the world could induce me to tell one."

"Then tell me, upon your oath, that the child is yours." There was no response. "You are silent!" exclaimed the husband. "If a doubt of my wife's guilt lingered in my mind, your hesitation would dispel it. But I doubt no longer. I consented to listen until the end, though I did not, one single instant, believe the story you were telling. I was patient, because I intended to circumvent you by asking you to swear, by your hopes of eternal salvation, that my wife is not guilty. You refuse; I am satisfied. Let this farce cease. My wife does not deserve that you should sacrifice your reputation for her sake; and your well meant falsehoods will not exonerate her."

"What can I say to touch your heart?" pleaded Madame de Marcenac, striving to overcome her emotion. "Can you really believe that I would accuse myself if I were not Bertha's mother? The facts I have mentioned are not invented. Tax your memory a little: compare dates, and you will be compelled to admit that Gabrielle cannot have deceived you. She has been a devoted friend to me; that is the only crime for which you can reproach her."

"Unless, on the contrary, you are sacrificing yourself for her," interrupted M. Larmor, sternly. "You speak of facts, and pretend that they exonerate her. Well, I admit that you were educated at the same school as she was, though I was not aware of that until to-day; I admit that you lost sight of each other for years, and that when you met at the expiration of the period, one of you applied to the other for aid in concealing her disgrace. Your story is correct, only the parts should be reversed. You took charge of your friend's daughter. To mislead people still more effectually, you gave the child your name. She is called Bertha. Had she been yours, she would perhaps have been named Gabrielle."

"You certainly were born to be a lawyer, sir," retorted the countess, who was regaining her accustomed calmness; "for you undoubtedly possess the art of misrepresenting situations, and of making the simplest question seem intricate. However, would you believe me if I took you into my daughter's presence and you heard her call me mother?"

"Perhaps so; but your daughter is not here. If you are willing to submit to this test, why do you refuse to swear that the girl is yours? Why don't you call upon God as a witness of this woman's innocence? I swear that if you will take the required oath, I will believe you!"

"That is to say, you will never again doubt Gabrielle's fidelity, and you will ask her forgiveness for having accused her?"

"Yes; if you swear that you are the mother of the child." Then, seeing her still hesitate, he added: "Come, I am waiting."

Paul, too, was waiting. He knew Bertha; he knew that she was truly religious, and that she fully understood the solemnity of an oath and the sin of perjury; so it was in an agony of suspense that he asked himself: "What is she going to say?"

"I swear that Bertha is my daughter!" the countess said, slowly; and then, in a louder and clearer tone, she added: "I hope, sir, that you will keep your word."

The husband displayed no alacrity in doing so, however; he lowered his eyes, and it was very evident that he had felt certain that Madame de Marcenac would not take the required oath. He now said to himself, however, that this was one of the cases where the end would justify the means in the opinion of a generous woman. Still, he dared not refuse to fulfil a promise he had willingly made, and so he extended his hand to his wife, although with rather bad grace, and said: "Rise; you owe your life to Madame de Marcenac; thank her, and let us leave this house!"

"Gabrielle need not thank me," interposed the countess, quickly; "and I trust our acquaintance will not end here. There is no longer any reason for concealing our friendship, and I hope you will do me the honour of bringing her to see me in Paris. I will take you to visit my daughter, for I am sure you will keep my secret, and will not prevent your wife from seeing the child to whom she is so attached."

The frown vanished from the husband's face, and he eagerly replied: "We will accept your invitation with pleasure, madame. Will to-morrow suit you?"

"Why not to-day?" inquired Madame de Marcenac. "There is nothing to detain me here. I am only going to take a few books and my portrait, and return to Paris. Jeanne Barbin can attend to the rest. There can be nothing, I think, to prevent you from taking the same train as myself. Martha will accompany me—as she is going to return to her pupil—and on reaching Paris, we will all go together to see Bertha. When you do see her, I think you will cease suspecting Gabrielle."

"I am ready to accompany you, and to acknowledge my mistake," said M. Larmor, although it was very evident that his submission depended upon the result of the approaching interview.

His wife had risen to her feet. She had dried her tears; but her manner was still that of a resigned victim, and she seemed to have lost all will of her own. Madame de Marcenac gave her husband no time to reconsider; but, after going into the school-room and coming out again, with her photograph in her hand, she said: "Come, sir; I have a carriage waiting which will hold all four of us very comfortably." No one made any reply. She passed out first; M. and Madame Larmor followed her without exchanging a word, and Martha Morgan brought up the rear.

Paul de Lizy allowed them to depart unhindered; and then sprang from his hiding-place. He was half frantic with rage, and a thousand extravagant projects flashed through his mind. He even thought of following them, and provoking a fresh scene which would, perhaps, result in a duel between himself and M. Larmor. The child, however, must be in the Rue Norvins, and to reach there in time it would be necessary for him to take the same train as the countess and her party did, and in that case Bertha or the governess would recognise him. "No; I will not go," he said, at last. "Curses upon the infamous creature who has so basely deceived me! I will never exchange another word with her while I live!" Thereupon he flew down stairs, rushed through the garden like a madman, and departed, as he entered, by climbing over the garden gate. Where was he going? He had not the slightest idea.

## IX.

ON the morning following Paul de Lizy's unfortunate excursion to Fontainebleau, Colonel Sigoulès was breakfasting alone in the public dining-room of the Continental Hôtel. "Paul must have returned before now," he said to himself, "and I will go and pay him a visit as soon as I have finished my meal." Having come to this decision, he proceeded to examine the people around him. There were not many persons in the room, and they all were strangers to him. There were some ladies, but not a pretty one among them; and the colonel, who liked to feast his eyes upon a pretty face, saw that he would be obliged to dispense with this most delightful complement to a succulent repast. He was about to console himself with larger mouthfuls when a gentleman and lady who seemed worthy of attention entered the room. The man was somewhat imposing in appearance, and wore the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour in his button-hole. The lady was not the colonel's ideal, by any means, for he was fond of plump figures, and she was very slender; but she had delicate features, a distinguished bearing, and superb eyes—the eyes of a creole—and these charms were quite sufficient to attract Sigoulès' attention under existing circumstances.

It chanced that the couple selected a table so near to his that he could hear every word of their conversation—and to crown the colonel's good fortune, the husband seated himself with his back toward Sigoulès, while the lady sat directly facing him. She did not, however, bestow the slightest attention upon him, for she only raised her eyes to look at her husband, who seemed to be in an excellent humour, and who ordered a breakfast worthy of an accomplished gourmet. When this task was accomplished, he leaned one elbow upon the table, and without troubling himself in the least as to whether any one was listening or not, exclaimed: "What a charming woman Madame de Marcenac is, and how much I regret not having made her acquaintance sooner! It is your fault, and one for which I find it difficult to forgive you."

The name of Marcenac made the colonel start, and instantly changed his current of thought, "Bertha is grace and goodness personified," replied the lady, with great feeling. "She proved that yesterday."

"When I think of the way I treated her, I feel positively ashamed of myself," said the husband, earnestly; "and I ask myself how I can ever make you all forget that unpleasant scene."

"I know a good way," said the wife, timidly.

"Point it out to me."

"It is only to love me as much as you loved me before."

"Why, I love you a hundred times more; I love you the more for all the pain I have caused you, and I swear that I have the most implicit confidence in you now. But I treated Madame de Marcenac most shamefully, and I should like to atone for it. How can I do so? I want your advice. What if we adopted the little girl she cannot acknowledge without bringing disgrace upon herself?"

"Adopt her! You really don't think of doing such a thing?"

"Why not? On the contrary, I *have* been thinking about it, and I see no objection. We have no children, so we are at liberty to bestow our affection upon your friend's child. She does not need our money; her



mother, who is much richer than we are, will provide for her handsomely; but who will protect her? Madame de Marcenac is still too young to condemn herself to a perpetual widowhood. If she marries again, which is more than likely, she cannot openly protect the child, but will be compelled to apply to friends like ourselves who are above prejudice and suspicion, as we have no one depending upon us. Why should we not come to her aid, and why should she not accept our help? Who has any right to make either comment or objection if we say we have adopted an orphan? The countess would lose nothing by it, as we are on such intimate terms with her. She can spend the summer with us at Bois le Roi, and we shall be in Paris all the winter. Her daughter is still too young to be curious about her birth; and even if she continued to call Madame de Marcenac mamma, no one will think any harm of it. People will regard it as a childish habit, for we won't conceal the fact that the countess took an interest in the child before we did. Now, what do you think of the scheme?"

"I think, my dear, that you men are always too rash. Yesterday you condemned me, and talked of killing me. You would have killed me, perhaps, had not Bertha arrived in time to dissuade you. And now you propose to adopt a child you wished to kill yesterday. How do you know if she would be willing to live with us?"

"I am sure she would, for we would employ the worthy peasant-woman who reared her, and also this Mademoiselle Morgan, who seems so devotedly attached to her. Don't you think that all three of them would be more comfortable at the château than in the dingy house where they have spent the past three days? Little Bertha is tired of the place already."

The reply to this remark was made in a very low tone, the wife having probably noticed that their neighbour was listening; and after this, the conversation was carried on in more subdued voices, for the lady made a sign to her husband which did not escape the colonel's keen eyes. Almost at the same moment Sigoulès espied the Viscount de la Cadière entering the room. There was nothing astonishing in this, however, as he was staying at the hotel. It was evident by his bearing that he felt perfectly at home, and that he entertained a profound contempt for the majority of the people assembled in the dining-room, but on perceiving the colonel, he instantly assumed that deferential and polished manner which aristocrats affect when they meet an equal with whom they are not on intimate terms. He proceeded slowly towards the table where Sigoulès was sitting, and that gentleman, amazed at the viscount's impudence, prepared to give him a suitable reception.

"Colonel," began M. de la Cadière with wonderful assurance, "I am delighted to meet you again. I hoped you would be at the club last evening; but I did not see you there, or your friend the Baron de Lizy either. I should have been glad to offer him his revenge, for I am really sorry to have won so much money from him. I should like to see him win it back again, and, above all, to know that he bears me no ill will. He would have retrieved his fortunes if he had come last night, for I lost steadily throughout. I did not go to bed until five o'clock, and so missed my usual ride in the Bois. You did the same it seems."

Sigoulès remained as silent as a fish and as stiff as a post; but the viscount was not easily disconcerted. He took a chair, and unceremoniously seated himself opposite the colonel, with his back to the couple occupying the next table. He had not so far honoured them with a single

glance. "You will allow me, I am sure, to order a cup of tea and some cold meat," he said to Sigoulès. "My breakfast is usually limited to that simple bill of fare. What wouldn't I give for a digestion like yours!"

Sigoulès was strongly tempted to rise and leave the table before finishing his breakfast so as to show the intruder that he would not tolerate such familiarity; and although he finally abandoned this idea, he maintained a haughty silence. Silence of any kind being supposed to give consent, the viscount took advantage of it to order his essentially English breakfast. "Are you still angry with me?" he smilingly asked.

"I don't know why I should be angry with you," replied the colonel, drily. "I scarcely know you; so you cannot possibly have offended me."

"If I have offended you in any way, I am very sorry, for I have taken a great liking to you; but yesterday you left me so abruptly in the Bois that I wondered all day what I could have done to annoy you. I saw very plainly that you wished to return to Paris without me, and you must do me the justice to say that I did not insist upon accompanying you. I thought I had, perhaps, made a mistake in saying anything about Madame de Marcenac. Yielding to one of those impulses a man cannot always resist, I repeated to you some of the reports that were formerly in circulation about the countess; and if this displeased you, allow me to remind you that you encouraged me. Besides, I knew to whom I was speaking, and it was for you to decide whether it was best to inform the Baron de Lizy or not."

Like all his compatriots, the Provençal viscount had a sonorous voice, so that the couple behind him did not lose a single word. Sigoulès, whose keen eyes nothing escaped, instantly noticed that Madame de Marcenac's name produced a singular effect upon the two persons who had heard it. The woman turned pale, and the man leaned back in his chair in order to hear the better. If the colonel had been on friendly terms with M. de la Cadière, he would have warned him by a sign, or have begged him in a low tone to change the subject; but Sigoulès was working solely in his friend Paul's interest, and felt certain that he might obtain much valuable information from La Cadière, so he allowed him to go on, but carefully abstained from making any reply for fear of compromising himself. La Cadière seemed to ask nothing better than to be allowed to talk uninterruptedly. He evidently recollected that the colonel knew all about his railway adventure with the baron, and he was desirous of allaying any suspicions which it might have awakened in the officer's mind. He had endeavoured to explain the circumstance the day before, and to impute the assassination of the usurer to Madame de Marcenac; but Sigoulès had left him very abruptly, and this was a good opportunity to resume the subject.

"This is a strange and unsatisfactory world," continued the viscount. "I like Monsieur de Lizy very much, and I owe him a heavy debt of gratitude, for he extricated me from a most trying dilemma. I thought I might repay my obligations by preventing him from committing a very foolish act; for I have reason to know that he thinks of marrying the Widow Marcenac, so I wanted to put him on his guard against the fascinations of a woman who is trying to win a husband in order to cover a disreputable past. Ah! I have been poorly rewarded for my good intentions, since I have become involved in a quarrel, both with your friend and yourself. But, fortunately, I have met you again, colonel; and I am going to explain to you fully the part I played in a drama which turned

into a tragedy. You know that on the night of Basfroi's assassination I was flying from a husband's vengeance, and that I stealthily entered the compartment of a railway carriage occupied by Monsieur de Lizy."

"He told me that you gave this explanation, and I think he believed you."

"I should be very sorry if he doubted it, for I could not prove my assertion without ruining the reputation of a lady whom I have visited very frequently. However, I fear that my visits are at an end, for, after the incidents of the other evening, she will be closely watched, and I don't feel inclined to run any such risks again. So if through any lack of discretion on Monsieur de Lizy's part a commissary summoned me to state how I employed my time the other night, I should flatly refuse to reply. I would rather be condemned."

"That would be truly heroic, I am sure," said the colonel, ironically.

"But Monsieur de Lizy is an honourable man, and he will remain silent; besides, it is absurd to suppose for a moment that he will be suspected of murdering a man he had never seen. I will wager a handsome amount that the culprit will never be discovered. The morning papers certainly state that the authorities are investigating the affair, but they will probably do that a long time, and will finally be obliged to give it up as a bad job."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders as if to say that he did not take the slightest interest in the affair, and threw his napkin on the table. He had finished his breakfast, and did not care to prolong the interview. But M. de la Cadière perseveringly remarked, "I suppose you have seen the baron since our meeting in the Bois?"

"No; I went to his house yesterday, but his servant told me that his master had gone to the country and would not be back until night."

"I hope he has not been foolish enough to go to Fontainebleau."

"Why would that be foolish?"

"Because he would fall into the very midst of a crowd of officials and detectives, and would be compelled to undergo another examination. Any number of annoying questions would be put to him; and I fear he is not shrewd enough to emerge from the ordeal unscathed. For instance, if any one said to him: 'BASFROI bequeathed his property to Madame de Marcenac. You are well acquainted with her. Will you kindly tell us something about her before we decide concerning her?' In that case, would Monsieur de Lizy have the presence of mind to reply that he knows nothing to the detriment of this lady?" Sigoulès was not duped by M. de la Cadière's pretended interest in the countess, and secretly wondered what his object could be. "And if any allusion were made to his travelling companion," continued the viscount, "would he keep the promise he made me at the club—the promise not to disclose my name?"

"I was not aware that he had made any such promise; but don't be alarmed, he has no intention of causing you any trouble."

"I am very grateful to him, although I have nothing to fear. But, unfortunately, on his arrival at the station, he repeated everything I had said to him to the commissary of police, and told him I had just leaped from the window of a château, not far from Melun. But what is the matter with you, my dear colonel?"

The colonel made no reply. He had seen the gentleman sitting behind M. de la Cadière whirl round rapidly in his chair, like a man who is preparing to interfere, and it was too late to warn the imprudent viscount

of the danger that threatened him. "Are you overcome with pity," asked La Cadière, "at the thought of that fool of a husband who took it into his head to return home unexpectedly, but who was not sharp enough to catch me?"

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the man behind him struck him heavily upon the shoulder, and hissed: "Get up sir; I have something to say to you!"

"Good! the bombshell has burst at last! I was expecting it," Sigoulès said to himself.

M. de la Cadière started violently on feeling the blow upon his shoulder; but, instead of obeying the command he had received, he only half turned, measuring with a scornful glance the stalwart man who had taken such a liberty. Then he coldly exclaimed, "I think it very singular that you should venture to touch me!"

The stranger was very pale, and his tall form completely screened the lady, whose distress was pitiable to behold. Sigoulès did not move. "It is the husband from the château near Melun," he thought. "It would appear that Cadière is not acquainted with him, for he does not seem to know what is wanted. If he is obliged to fight, he will only get his deserts."

"Get up, I tell you!" repeated the husband, in suppressed fury. "Don't you see that I am standing?"

"Yes, I do; but I fail to understand why you should disturb me. I don't know who you are, and I am not in the habit of talking with the first person I happen to meet in a public place."

"I am Jacques Larmor. Do you understand now?"

M. de la Cadière did unquestionably understand, for his face changed, and he decided to rise. As he did so, M. Larmor stepped aside, probably to prepare for a sudden attack, and the movement revealed the wife who was still seated at the table. She could now see La Cadière's face, and on beholding it, she uttered a half-stifled cry, which was heard by Sigoulès, but not by the husband, who was absorbed in his intense rage. It was evident that the woman would faint in another moment, and the colonel, anxious to avert an open scandal, decided to interfere. "You forget, sir," he said, "that this lady is present, and that the room is full of people."

La Cadière had seen the lady; and he, too, had only partially stifled the exclamation of surprise that rose to his lips. "If you must have an explanation," resumed the colonel, "it had better take place in the courtyard of the hotel, or even in the street, rather than in this restaurant, and in madame's presence."

"That is true," replied the husband, brusquely. "My wife is in the way here, and I will take her to her room. We are staying in this hotel, so I shall not be detained long, and I beg of you to wait for me under the arcade."

Taking the viscount's silence for consent, M. Larmor then made a sign to his wife, who rose and left the room with him. There had been time enough for her to recover somewhat from her emotion, and before she departed she darted a look of contempt at M. de la Cadière, who met it unflinchingly, and said to Sigoulès: "I am not at this brute's orders; I have a great mind to decamp. What do you think, colonel?"

"I have no advice to give you; but for myself I should prefer to settle the matter now, especially as the gentleman will have no difficulty in ascertaining who you are and where you live. It was he, I suppose, who returned home so inopportunistically and took you by surprise."

"Yes; I did not know him until he mentioned his name, for I had never seen him before."

"What, you did not know him until he told you his name?"

"No; this is a peculiar case, which I will explain to you one of these days. I wonder how the deuce he learned that it was I who was breakfasting behind him?"

"It was your own fault. You were telling me that you were obliged to beat a hasty retreat from a château in the vicinity of Melun. If this gentleman owns one in that neighbourhood, and if there was a disturbance there the other night, he must have understood that it was of him you were speaking in such uncomplimentary terms. He had been listening to what you said for some time, and not without showing unmistakeable signs of wrath and impatience."

"You should have warned me."

"Excuse me, sir; I wish you to observe that your affairs do not interest me in the least. Go and meet the injured husband; or, on the contrary, avoid him; it matters little to me. I shall remain here. I have finished my breakfast, but I have not had my coffee."

"Very well, sir," replied the viscount, with an air of pique. "I thought you would take my part against this madman. I was mistaken, it seems. We will say no more about it, but I sincerely hope we may never meet again."

He hastened from the room, after throwing the price of his scarcely-tasted breakfast upon the table; and Sigoulès, delighted to get rid of him, immediately summoned the waiter and settled his bill, for he was even more anxious than ever to hasten to Paul's house and repeat what he had heard. Besides, he did not care to see the husband and wife again, for fear of becoming involved in fresh complications. For this reason he left the room a few moments after M. de la Cadière, going out by a side-door conducting to the staircase. Unfortunately, at the end of the passage he found himself face to face with the injured husband, who was apparently hastening back to the dining-room, and who roughly said: "Where is the man who was breakfasting with you? I told him to meet me under the arcade, but he is not there."

"Well, what do you expect me to do about it?" responded the colonel, coolly.

"As the coward has run away, I expect you to give me satisfaction in his stead."

Sigoulès was endowed with an invincible *sang-froid*, and he coldly replied: "I am a soldier, sir. I have been in the service thirty years, and I have never refused satisfaction to those I offended; but I never fought for another person, and I shall not begin doing so at my age. The person you are looking for is no friend of mine. He is a gentleman whom I met at a club, and who did not request permission to seat himself at my table. Had he asked it, I should certainly have refused it. Now, will you kindly explain why I should feel called upon to fight his battles?"

"But you, at least, know his name?"

"Yes; he is known as the Viscount de la Cadière, and he resides in this hotel. I am also staying here. I am Colonel Sigoulès."

This frank, and at the same time firm language, calmed M. Larmor considerably. "Excuse me, sir," he said, almost humbly; "my senses seem to have deserted me. The insult I received in your presence exasperated me beyond endurance."

"Insult ! What insult ?"

"My keeper fired at a man who was making his escape from my country-house, and missed his aim. Excuse me, but I should have told you that my château is near Melun. It must be mine that scoundrel referred to. I have been trying to ascertain who he could be, and he has betrayed himself."

"Excuse me; he merely said that he leapt from a window. It is a rather rash conclusion that you draw from his words, it seems to me."

"He made an insulting allusion to the husband he had betrayed."

"But there is more than one château in the neighbourhood of Melun. Didn't you see, when you spoke to him, that he had not the slightest idea who you were?"

"Nevertheless, my wife and he have been acquainted for a long time, that is very evident. But it is for me to avenge my outraged honour, and I beg that you will be kind enough to forget what I just said to you."

"You can, at least, feel assured that I shall not noise the affair abroad, and that your adversary will not have me for a second if you compel him to fight."

"Will you be *my* second?"

"By no means. I have not the honour of knowing you, and there are many other reasons which make me unwilling to take any part in such a delicate affair."

"You are right, sir; but one word more before we separate. This man mentioned a lady's name. He spoke of the Countess de Marcenac, and of a crime committed at Fontainebleau——"

"You must apply to him for an explanation, if you deem it expedient to do so. I can give you no information on the subject, and there is nothing left for me but to take leave of you."

M. Larmor made no reply, and Sigoulès profited by the opportunity to put on his hat and rush off. What he wanted, most of all, was to get away as quickly as possible, and this time he succeeded in making his escape, for the husband, being decidedly nonplussed at the colonel's straightforward replies, did not attempt to detain him.

Sigoulès repaired to the arcade, but saw no sign of M. de la Cadière, who had walked away without waiting for his adversary; but he did see a carriage passing, and heard some one inside it call him by name. He did not recognise the voice; but he paused, nevertheless. The carriage, which was a private brougham, driven by a coachman in quiet livery, had passed the colonel, and the driver was obliged to turn back. The carriage door then speedily opened, and Paul de Lizy sprang out. "What, is it you?" cried Sigoulès. "You were coming to see me, I suppose?"

"Yes; I waited for you all the morning, and as you did not come——"

"Then you are no longer angry with me?"

"I was never angry with you. All day yesterday I was at Fontainebleau, and when I have given you an account of my trip——" Paul did not finish his sentence, for at this moment he saw a gentleman emerge from the hotel, and hasten along the Rue de Rivoli. He had recognised the gentleman in question, and was wondering how he happened to be there. Sigoulès had also recognised the man, who was none other than M. Larmor; and he felt some anxiety, as the jealous husband might be hastening after him to renew the controversy. But the colonel was mistaken. M. Larmor passed by, merely giving him a hasty nod, which could hardly be called a bow. The colonel did not think it necessary to return it, but Paul de

Lizy, who had noticed the nod, said to his friend: "Is it possible that you know that man? Where did you make his acquaintance?"

"I will tell you presently; but do you also know him?"

"It was because I wished to speak to you about him that I came to look for you. But we cannot talk here. Get into my brougham, I want you to accompany me. Can you spare me an hour?"

"The entire day, if you need it. I have nothing better to do than to serve you—if I can."

"Come, then!" said Paul, opening the carriage door. The colonel stepped in, and Paul took a seat beside him, after saying a few words to the driver, who turned his horse's head towards the Rue de la Paix. "Do you know the name of the gentleman who passed us just now?" asked Lizy, as soon as he had seated himself.

"Yes; I just learned it by the merest chance while I was breakfasting at the hotel. He took a seat near me with his wife. They talked quite freely of their domestic affairs, and the conversation interested me greatly. I will explain why." And the colonel proceeded to describe the scene in which he had been an involuntary actor. "Now you know as much as I do," he said, in conclusion. "This strange adventure would seem to indicate that the viscount was really playing the part of a gay Lothario on the night of Basfroi's assassination."

"I had several reasons for not believing that he told the truth, but I doubt him no longer," replied Paul. "The scoundrel did not murder Basfroi, but he is really Madame Larmor's lover."

"Well, now, you, in turn, my dear friend, must tell me who these Larmors are, and how they happen to know Madame de Marcenac, for I forgot to tell you that they talked of no one else until the viscount's arrival. I heard the entire conversation, and her name was mentioned every other second."

"What did they say about her?"

"Several things which I did not understand very well. The husband praised her warmly, and asked what he could do to win her favour. There was also an allusion made to a child," added the colonel, with some embarrassment. "Oh! they said nothing amiss; but I heard the husband propose that they should adopt the child—which is a girl, it seems. The wife replied that the little one would not consent to leave her mother."

"And her mother is Madame de Marcenac?"

"So they said, but I do not know that I ought to repeat it."

"You have told me nothing new. I have been aware of it since yesterday. I will tell you what kind of a person this countess who condescended to promise me her hand really is." And Paul, in turn, informed the colonel of all that had taken place at Fontainebleau. "Yes, Sigoulès," he said, in conclusion, "she solemnly swore that she was the true mother. Recollect that she is a firm believer, and that she does not treat religious matters lightly. What do you say to all this now? Is not the evidence sufficiently conclusive?" The colonel seemed in no haste to reply, and Paul continued: "The whole party finally left, entirely reconciled and satisfied with one another. Bertha, who had come in a carriage with the governess, drove the Larmors to the station, where they all took the train for Paris. The husband was impatient to take his wife into the child's presence; and this test must have resulted favourably to her, as you say the couple were breakfasting together so amicably this morning. I spent a terrible night, and decided this morning to start out in pursuit of you."

You are the only friend I can consult, not about my engagement—for I have fully decided to break it off—but about the best means of thwarting the countess and compelling her to acknowledge her shame. I am determined to have this satisfaction."

"A very poor satisfaction, it seems to me, my dear friend," replied Sigoulès. "If I were in your place, I would forego it. I mean to try and ferret out the truth of this affair, which seems to me so full of contradictions. In the first place, I am not yet fully satisfied that the countess has not sacrificed herself for Madame Larmor's sake. A pious falsehood is no crime in some cases. Who knows but what the countess, if questioned by you, would not confess that she had sworn a false oath so as to quiet the furious man who was threatening to kill his wife?"

"She must admit this in Monsieur Larmor's presence."

"By demanding that, you would subject her to a cruel test, and expose her friend to terrible danger. It seems to me there is a much better course for you to pursue. Bestow your attention, or at least a portion of it, on the child. You ought to see the little girl in company with Madame Larmor and Madame de Marcenac, and you would soon be able to decide which of these women is the real mother."

"I thought of that, but I am almost certain that the husband made use of this test; and it is evident that the result was not favourable to the countess."

"That is possible, but it is equally possible that the child had been carefully tutored. She is nine years old, quite old enough to act a part in order to deceive Monsieur Larmor. But the husband must not be present: then we shall feel sure that the child's demonstrations of affection are sincere. However, it is rather difficult to make the necessary arrangements for my programme. In the first place, we do not know where the little girl is now staying. I have a clue, but only a very vague one." Thereupon the colonel gave Paul all the particulars of his meeting with Madame de Marcenac in the Bois de Boulogne, and concluded by saying that he had also seen the little girl whom the countess had acknowledged as her offspring. "What is even better," he added, "I talked with her. She is very pretty and interesting. I can certify, too, that she does not in the least resemble Madame de Marcenac, who is a perfect blonde. This little girl has black hair, and the complexion of a creole."

"Resemblances indicate nothing in such cases."

"I must admit, too, that the features are not at all like those of Madame Larmor. The nurse who accompanied her was evidently a country-woman. The child called her Jeannette."

"Yes; Jeanne Barbin, formerly a servant in Monsieur Plantier's household. It was she who signed the lease of the villa so that Madame de Marcenac's name need not appear in the transaction."

"The child spoke of her aunt Gabrielle and her cousin Martha."

"Yes; Martha Morgan is the governess, and Madame Larmor's Christian name is Gabrielle. The little girl has been brought up to call her 'aunt,' although there is not the slightest relationship between them. Is this explanation sufficiently clear?"

"I cannot say that I clearly understand the situation yet. The child is named Bertha, like Madame de Marcenac; but she may be only her godchild. I also learned, by listening to the little one's prattle, that she had only lived in Paris for two days; that her aunt and cousin had not



yet arrived, but that they would be here soon, and that she had just parted from her mamma, who could not spend the day with her. I admit that all these appearances are against the countess; however, I must have decisive proofs. When I have seen the mother and daughter together, I shall know. But how the deuce am I to bring that about? The child and her nurse, on leaving the pastrycook's where I saw them, entered a cab, which took them towards the Boulevard de Courcelles."

"Or, in other words, towards Montmartre."

"Why are you so sure of that?"

"Because the governess I followed the other night was to carry the countess's letter to the Rue Norvins, at Montmartre. She denied it to me, but I heard her ask her way of a policeman. This letter must have been addressed to Jeanne Barbin, and probably contained a request for her to bring the child to the Bois de Boulogne, the mother not yet daring to visit her daughter in her new home. She does so now, however, as she went there yesterday with the Larmors; so we have some chance of finding her there to-day. She is not aware that I know all; she thinks that I am only sulking, and will soon return and throw myself at her feet. In the meantime, as she fancies I am shut up at home, she has ceased to take any precautions against a chance meeting, and is devoting herself to her daughter."

"Why, here we are at Montmartre!" exclaimed Sigoulès, suddenly.

"This is the Place Pigalle. I see you are going to try to take Madame de Marcenac by surprise."

"Yes; I decided on this plan after careful consideration; and you will be of great service to me, for you have seen the child and can identify her."

"Without the slightest difficulty; but I can't promise to find the house. Do you know where it is?"

"I know it is in the Rue Norvins, and that the Rue Norvins is on the summit of the hill. We will discover its exact position by inquiry."

The brougham drew up against the sidewalk at the very spot where Paul de Lizy had talked so long with Martha Morgan the night before; and the colonel sprang hastily out, remarking, as he did so: "I warn you that I am not very familiar with the topography of the heights of Montmartre."

"Nor am I," replied Paul; "but I know that the Rue Norvins is near the church, so we must go straight to the top of the hill."

They took a narrow street which led them to the foot of a rude flight of steps, which they ascended, and then on stopping to make inquiries they were directed to take a steep and narrow street which would soon intersect the Rue Norvins. At Montmartre, the slope is so great that the third storey of one house is often on a level with the basement of another in the street above. Nearly all the tenements, also, have a garden and two entrances. "If I am not very much mistaken," said the colonel, "the back of the house we are seeking would overlook this street. Let us carefully examine all the houses on our left hand. Madame de Marcenac has not placed the child in a house occupied by several tenants. Isolation and extensive grounds would be essentials, as a child accustomed to living in the country must have plenty of air."

Paul nodded his assent to this remark, and before they had taken a hundred paces Sigoulès stopped short, exclaiming: "Here is one that possesses all the essential requirements."

"Which?" inquired Paul. "I see a garden but no house."

"Nor do I," replied the colonel, "but let us draw back a little, and we shall perhaps succeed in catching a glimpse of the house."

They crossed to the opposite side of the street, whence they obtained an excellent view of this singular property. A sloping garden—in fact, an exceedingly steep one—extended to the Rue Gabrielle, where the two gentlemen were standing. It was separated from the street by a low stone wall, in the centre of which there was a rickety wooden gate which could have been burst open by a vigorous push; nor would any urchin have had the slightest difficulty in scaling the wall. This garden, which was very badly kept, was full of old trees, and so overgrown with briars that it resembled a miniature virgin forest. There were no borders or flowerbeds, merely a few walks, of which the grass and weeds were gradually gaining possession. In the rear of the garden extended a dilapidated terrace, at one end of which stood a structure as peculiar as its surroundings. It was four stories high, with but one double window on each floor, and it was surmounted by a sort of glass cage, which looked as if it had once served as a photographer's studio. There were two doorways, one in the basement leading straight into the garden, and one on the floor above communicating with the terrace. At one end of this terrace there was another gate, and yet another one in the garden, on the right, the latter similar to the one which opened upon the Rue Gabrielle, and in no better state of repair.

"Nonsense!" sneered Paul, "this house is unoccupied."

"I think it has been vacant for a long time," replied Sigoulès, "but that is not the case now. There are curtains at the windows; and I see some linen drying on the grass."

"But where is the Rue Norvins? Madame de Marcenac's messenger was going to the Rue Norvins."

"It must be near by. Probably the terrace gate faces it, and that, no doubt, is the one where visitors ring. However, there is nothing to prevent us from ascertaining if such is really the fact. I see a worthy woman of whom I will inquire."

The person referred to was an old woman, who happened to be standing at the door of a small grocer's shop a short distance off. "That is a queer garden," the colonel laughingly remarked to the woman, "and there must be a fine view from the top of that strange lighthouse up there."

"You can see Paris from it as plainly as if you were in a balloon," replied the woman. "During the siege some officers were stationed there to watch the Prussians."

"The house would suit me admirably. I am an artist, and I am looking for a studio."

"You ought to have come sooner. The house stood vacant for ten years, because the owner wasn't willing to repair it; but it must be let now, for I have seen a number of people there lately."

"Some photographer has taken it, perhaps?"

"I think not, for I have only seen ladies. Oh, yes! yesterday a gentleman came. I saw him walking about the garden with three ladies. They all looked like very stylish people. I should be glad if they would deal here, for business is very dull; but I suppose they will go to the grocer's in the Rue Norvins."

"The Rue Norvins is the very street I am looking for."

"It is the street above. The shortest way to get there is to climb those steps there on the right. They lead to a small square called the Place du

Tertre. When you reach it, you will see the Rue Norvins on your left. But haven't you ever been in Montmartre before, sir?"

"No; I reside at the other end of Paris, and I am acquainted with no one in this part of the city, but I am pleased with the locality and should like to establish myself here. It is a pity that house is occupied. But for that I would take it, and you should have my patronage, I assure you."

"It would be very welcome; and if you cared to buy the house I'm sure that it is for sale. It wouldn't cost you much, for the owner would be glad to get rid of it; but you would have to take it as it stands, for he is an old miser who won't spend a penny upon it, I can tell you that in advance."

"I don't care for that. Where is he to be found?"

"I can't give you his exact address; I only know that he keeps a big jewellery shop in the Palais Royal. The new tenants must know him, and they can tell you more about him than I can. You had better ask them."

"I will, if they are at home."

"Well, to-day I have seen no one there but a servant, dressed in country fashion, and a little girl with a hoop. That does not prove that the others are out of doors, however. Ring at the gate facing the Place du Tertre, and ring loud, for the house is some distance off."

Sigoulès took the arm of his friend, who had not opened his lips, but who had listened with intense interest and astonishment. "Well!" exclaimed the colonel, as soon as they were out of the woman's hearing, "what do you think of my powers of discernment now? The child has been here two or three days with her nurse; and Monsieur Larmor called yesterday with Madame Larmor, Madame de Marcenac, and the governess."

"Yes," replied Paul, "and they must have been on the best of terms, as they were all promenading together; so it is evident that the countess is the mother of the child. I don't see now what possible good it can do for us to visit the house. I don't suppose that you are going to try to extort information from the servant."

"No. Her suspicions would be aroused at once, for she saw me talking to the little girl in the confectioner's yesterday. But let us make a tour of inspection, and we shall perhaps be able to ascertain if Madame de Marcenac is here without going in. We will be governed by circumstances."

"You are right," replied Paul, after a moment's silence. "I would like this matter settled, once for all, and the sooner the better."

## X.

PAUL DE LIZY and Colonel Sigoulès began to climb the steps, which proved so steep that the two friends were obliged to pause on the second landing to take breath. On their left was the side gate of the garden, and they found the landing a much better point of observation than the street below, as there was nothing to conceal the grounds from their eager eyes. A grass-grown path extended from the gate to the wall on the opposite side of the garden, and this path and the terrace seemed to be the only promenades of the singular domain. As the friends stood looking over the wall, Sigoulès suddenly nudged Paul, and whispered: "Look? there is the little girl now."

The child was coming straight towards them along the weedy path

conducting to the gate, but she did not see them, for she held a book that she was reading attentively. She advanced very slowly, occasionally stopping short for a minute or two, and her book must have interested her deeply, for she did not raise her eyes. Paul gazed at her most intently, and the nearer she came the plainer he could see that she did not resemble Madame de Marcenac in the least. Their features were not at all alike, and those of the little girl had a grave expression, which was in marked contrast with the countess's gay and radiant look. It seemed almost as if the child realised her unfortunate position. This had been the colonel's impression while he was at the confectioner's, and Paul, who now shared it, felt new hope spring up in his heart. The delicate little creature inspired sympathy, not dislike, and the baron, to his great astonishment, felt no desire to curse her. These feelings, which were so utterly unlike those he had expected to experience, seemed to him a favourable omen. "Poor little one!" he said to himself, "she is not to blame. It is not her fault if she has no name. The mother who has denied her is alone to blame, and if Madame Larmor is her mother, her husband will do right to kill her. But if Madame Larmor is not her mother, Bertha Plantier is a monster; for, if she had possessed any heart, she would have forced her daughter on the ruined nobleman who married her for her fortune. The count had no scruples; he would have accepted the child for the sake of the dowry. It would have been more honourable and courageous than to deceive every one and expose a school friend to the vengeance of an enraged husband, as she seems to have done."

Sigoulès, meanwhile, was thinking: "I am very much afraid that the result of this venture will not be favourable to the countess; but when the wine is drawn, it must be drunk. Besides, suspense is the worst of evils, and Paul cannot endure it much longer."

The little girl was still slowly approaching. A few steps more would bring her to the gate, near which the friends were standing, and there even seemed some danger that she would run against it, so deeply was she absorbed in her book. But it is a well-known fact that you do not need your eyes to discover that some one is looking at you. On the contrary, you are warned by a sort of magnetic current established between the person who is watched and the person watching. The child suddenly paused, raised her head, and on perceiving the two gentlemen turned as if to run away. But on bestowing one more glance at the strangers, she recognised the colonel, and, instead of flying, she hastened toward him with a smile upon her lips. "Good morning, sir," she cried, in a sweet, bird-like voice. "Don't you know me?" she continued, for Sigoulès, taken by surprise, did not know what to reply. "I recognised you as soon as I saw you. You are the gentleman who asked me yesterday, at the pastry-cook's, if I was a gourmand."

"I did very wrong, mademoiselle, for you were quite satisfied with a meringue or two. I see, too, that you are a great student, for you read instead of playing in the garden."

"Not always; but the book I have here is very interesting, and I want to finish it. It is 'Robinson Crusoe.' Mamma gave it to me when she came to Fontainebleau to fetch me, and I have hardly laid it down since. It seems to me that I am on a desert island here, and that I shall certainly meet Friday."

"This is rather a lonely place. Do you like it?"

"Not very much; I wish I was back in the forest. But I shall soon

get used to it, I suppose ; besides, I shall have more company here. My aunt Gabrielle and my cousin Martha came to see me yesterday. Martha is going to live with us, and I shall see mamma every day. I am expecting her now."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes ; Martha stayed with mamma last night, and Jeannette has gone to market. I am not at all afraid, though."

"You are very brave, mademoiselle ; but tell me, didn't your mother scold you yesterday when she heard of your visit to the pastry-cook's?"

"No, sir ; in the first place, mamma never scolds me—it is my aunt Gabrielle who does that when I give Jeannette trouble—but I see her so seldom. That doesn't prevent me from loving her though. Mamma only asked me how the gentleman looked who spoke to me in the shop. I described you, and she said she should like to have been there to see you. But now I think of it, won't you come in ? She will be here soon."

The colonel looked at Paul, who had listened to this conversation with ill-disguised emotion, and who now made a sign which Sigoulès took for one of encouragement, so he replied : "I should be very glad to see your mother, but I have not the honour of her acquaintance. I do not even know her name."

"Mamma's name is Bertha, like mine."

Paul expected this answer, and it made him determine upon a final interview with the countess.

"She may take offence if I enter her garden without permission," said the colonel.

"That isn't at all likely, as she wishes to see you. She has great confidence in me. I have the keys of this gate and the gate below. Mamma has keys, too. She generally comes by way of the Rue Gabrielle. I can open this gate for you," she added, suiting the action to the words.

"Can my friend come in, too?" asked Sigoulès, pointing to Paul.

"Certainly, sir," the child replied, in the serious tone of a grown-up hostess doing the honours of her house. It was easy to see that she was delighted to play the lady.

They entered, and she entirely forgot to close the gate after them. "How strange it is !" exclaimed the colonel, hypocritically ; "we are going to the top of the hill to admire the beautiful view, and the first person I meet is a charming little lady I saw in an entirely different part of Paris yesterday."

"That is not as strange as the story of 'Robinson Crusoe.' But you must admit that it is not very pretty here. There isn't a single flower in the garden. Ah ! if you could only have seen those we had at Fontainebleau ! But mamma promises me that we shall soon have a gardener, and I will help him. We shall have lots of roses. Do you like roses?"

"Very much, mademoiselle ; and I am sure that your mamma likes them, too. Did she live with you in the country?"

"No ; but she came to see me every week."

"Have you always lived at Fontainebleau?"

"Always ; but my nurse tells me that I was not born there. Still I do not remember any other place."

"Yes," thought Paul, bitterly, remembering what he had heard at the villa ; "she was born in Italy, and her foster-mother lived at Vendôme."

"I wasn't lonely at Fontainebleau," continued the child ; "and I'm sure I shall never be lonely in Paris, there are so many people. No one

ever passed by our little house in going to the forest, though an old gentlemen, who always gave me money to buy toys, often came to see us. But he always asked me to show him how much money I had left, and he often scolded me because I had spent too much. Mamma says he is a friend of hers, but I don't like him very much."

"It was, perhaps, the same old gentleman who came to see you yesterday," remarked the colonel.

"Did I tell you there was a gentleman here?" She had not mentioned the fact. It was the grocer's wife who had spoken of it. Sigoulès had made a blunder, but without noticing it the child continued: "No, the gentleman who was here yesterday is not the same one who used to come to see us at Fontainebleau. He is much younger, and doesn't appear to be very good-natured. Aunt Gabrielle scarcely dared to look at him. She acted as if she was afraid of him."

"It was her husband, perhaps."

"No; she hasn't any husband."

"Then how is she your aunt?"

"I don't know," replied the little girl, in great astonishment. She evidently had not the slightest idea of the ties of relationship. "All I do know is that I have always called her aunt."

The colonel was going to question her further, but the child turned suddenly, and exclaimed: "There is mamma now!"

On hearing this cry, Paul and the colonel both looked towards the gate by which they had entered, but saw no one. They momentarily forgot that there was an entrance in the Rue Gabrielle; that is to say, below; so neither of them looked in that direction. But the little girl, who was familiar with all the grounds, and who had excellent eyes, had just perceived her mother through the trees. The new comer was approaching by a footpath which wound round among the briars and shrubbery, and only her hat was visible, and that merely at rare intervals. This was quite enough, however, for the little girl; but the two friends were in a painful state of suspense. Nor for long, however, for just as the child was about to dart off to meet her mother, a voice which both Lizy and Sigoulès instantly recognised cried out: "Don't come, Bertha. This path is very slippery, and you might fall. A little patience, and I shall be with you."

Sigoulès, who had hoped to see Madame Larmor, made a gesture of disappointment, and Paul turned very pale. The child seemed to have entirely forgotten their existence, although she obeyed her mother's order; but she hid behind the trunk of a tree in order to surprise her, and when Madame de Marcenac reached the level ground, the child sprang out, threw her arms round her neck, and covered her face with kisses. The attack was so sudden that the countess did not at first notice the two friends, although they were but a few paces from her. "Bertha," she murmured, half laughing, half scolding, "do you want to stifle me, you little goose? You are choking me, child! You wouldn't dare to treat your aunt Gabrielle like this!"

"Because she is more severe than you are. That is the reason I like you best, mamma."

"Ah, well! I shall become as stern as she is, then. Come, stop this nonsense, and give me a chance to breathe."

Bertha reluctantly obeyed, and as the countess raised her head, she beheld the colonel, who stood gnawing his moustache, and Paul de Lizy, who confronted her with folded arms and an expression of withering

scorn upon his handsome face. Madame de Marcenac could not repress an exclamation of sorrowful surprise; but she did not lose her self-possession, and her countenance assumed an expression of wounded pride which rather surprised the two friends. "Mamma," began the little girl, "this is the gentleman I met yesterday morning on returning from the Bois. Jeannette scolded me because I talked with him, you know. I saw him just now at the gate, and asked him to come in. It wasn't wrong for me to do it, was it, mamma?"

"Run away now, my dear child," was Madame de Marcenac's only reply. "Go up to your room, and wait for me; and if Jeannette comes in, ask her to remain with you. I have a few words to say to these gentlemen."

Bertha pouted a little, but finally started for the house, after bestowing a gesture of farewell upon the colonel. The countess watched the child until she was out of sight, and then faced the enemy. "You are playing the spy on me, I see," she said, coldly.

"I assure you that you are mistaken, madame," protested Sigoulès.

"Spare yourself the trouble of inventing excuses, sir; it is not you I am addressing. I wish to have nothing more to do with you. I will only say that after our conversation of yesterday I was not prepared for this hostility on your part."

"God knows I am not your enemy, madame; I——"

"I repeat that I am talking to Monsieur de Lizy, sir. He has a right to know what I do. I cannot blame him, and I am going to answer the questions I read in his eyes."

"I have only one question to put to you," said Paul. "Is this child that calls you 'mother' yours?"

A tear came to Madame de Marcenac's eyes, and for a moment she could not reply. "If I should answer 'Yes,' what would you say?" she at last responded.

"Nothing; I have been aware of the fact since yesterday."

"And it was undoubtedly your friend who informed you. He probably told you that Bertha met me in the Bois, and from that you concluded that I was her mother."

"A very natural conclusion, you must admit; but in matters connected with a woman I expect to marry I don't consult my friends, but believe only what I myself see or hear."

"That is very sensible on your part; but from what facts or conversation have you arrived at this conclusion so quickly? It was only the day before yesterday that you asked me to marry you."

"I have no idea of rendering an account to you; and I beg to remind you that you have not yet answered my question."

"What good would it do for me to answer it when you are already sure of what you assert?"

"I desire a confession; and I will add that a confession would raise you considerably in my estimation. There is a certain grandeur in confessing a fault, and it is certainly far better than shielding one's self by falsehoods which will certainly be discovered sooner or later."

"There are truths which are sometimes mistaken for falsehoods, so improbable do they appear. Suppose, for a moment, that an honest woman—out of compassion and love for a friend—should assume the responsibility of a fault which this friend has committed; suppose she assumes it at the risk of ruining her own reputation and happiness, even

her life. No one would believe such a thing possible—you, least of all. If I solemnly assured you that Bertha is the illegitimate child of a friend who was brought up with me, that I adopted her to save her mother from the vengeance of a pitiless husband, and that to fulfil the task completely I allowed this child to believe that she is mine, you would sneer at my protestations, would you not? Or even if you consented to listen to them, you would insist upon my revealing the name of the real culprit, and, if I refused, you would pitilessly condemn me. Yet all this is true, as I could prove to you; but I cannot and will not. Ask your friend here what I said to him yesterday, when he questioned me in the hope of obtaining an explanation of my visits to Fontainebleau."

"It isn't necessary; I know what took you there. I also know that the woman for whom you pretend to have sacrificed yourself is named Madame Larmor. Her husband is connected with the Lyons railway, and they reside in a château at Bois le Roi."

The countess started violently. The shot had told. "I do not know how you learned this secret," she said, with unconcealed emotion; "but as you have learnt it, pray tell me what you would do if Madame Larmor assured you, in my presence, that Bertha is her daughter, and related her sorrowful story?"

"I should not believe a word of it. Yesterday, at Fontainebleau, you told her husband a very different tale."

"What do you mean?" stammered the astonished countess.

"I see that you have made arrangements to guard against any possible accident. Your plan is very simple and convenient. When Monsieur Larmor is present, you are the culprit, as you call Heaven itself to witness; when he is not present, and I am the accuser, Madame Larmor will take any oath I may require to convince me of your innocence. You saved her yesterday, and she would save you, in turn, if I were not so well acquainted with the facts that it is useless for her to attempt it. I saw everything with my own eyes, and heard it with my own ears, I tell you."

"That is impossible!"

"Do you think so? Will you deny that you went, yesterday, to the villa at Fontainebleau, and that you found Monsieur Larmor there, threatening to kill his wife. Do not deny it; I was present."

"You!"

"Yes, I. I entered the house before he did, and when he came in I concealed myself in a closet which is only separated from your daughter's bedroom by a thin partition. I did not leave my hiding-place until after your departure."

Overcome with consternation, Madame de Marcenac hung her head; but soon she raised it again, and, in a voice trembling with indignation, said: "What you have done is infamous! It matters little to me now whether you think well of me or not; but I pity poor Gabrielle for being at your mercy. There now only remains for you to go and denounce Madame Larmor to her husband."

"Denounce her! You forget that my mind is made up now. This morning I could still force myself to doubt. I wished to be absolutely certain. Your daughter has just furnished me with conclusive proof. You won't, I trust, endeavour to persuade me that a child only nine years of age would play a part to deceive spectators."

"Believe whatever you please, sir; I have no intention of defending



myself; and I beg of you to retire. I am in my own house; you entered it surreptitiously in my absence, and I trust that your visit will not be repeated. It is not necessary to add, I think, that my doors will henceforth be closed against you. It will be far better for us never to meet again; and I thank Monsieur Sigoulès for having hastened a *dénouement* that was inevitable."

This remark elicited a frown from the colonel, who was beginning to change his mind about Madame de Marcenac. Her manner and language had impressed him very forcibly, and he felt half inclined to believe her innocent in spite of the confession she scorned to retract. "Madame," he said, eagerly, "you attribute to me a work which I am little disposed to claim credit for. Paul, if you would only condescend to question him, will certainly tell you that he came here entirely of his own accord; and if I made no attempt to dissuade him, it was only because I firmly believed that this visit would serve to vindicate you. You have but one enemy, Monsieur de la Cadière, a real or pretended viscount."

"You have told me that once before, sir," replied the countess; "but I think you are mistaken. I despise this man, but I see no reason why he should be my enemy. I do not even know him."

"Then why do you despise him?" asked Paul de Lizy, ironically.

"Because he has made the most atrocious insinuations against me. Has he not given you to understand that the assassination of my father's former partner would benefit me, and that I, perhaps, instigated it? It was your friend who repeated this shameful slander to me."

"Are you ignorant of the fact that Monsieur Basfroi made you his sole legatee?" asked Paul. "I had a conversation with the investigating magistrate yesterday, and he showed me the will. You will receive a fortune of two or three million francs, and the will expresses the wish that you will transfer this fortune to your daughter if you are not willing to accept it. Besides, nothing could be more natural. You often visited him, and he frequently went to see the child you had installed in the Rue des Sorbiers. He must have been greatly attached to her."

"Am I to regard this as another accusation against me?" asked Madame de Marcenac, bitterly.

"No; I only feel it my duty to warn you that the authorities have made inquiries about the connection which existed between Monsieur Basfroi and yourself, and that you may expect to be examined. The magistrate I saw expressed great surprise that you had not come of your own accord to give your testimony."

"I am ready; but I shall wait until I am summoned."

"You perhaps do wrong to wait."

"You must allow me to be guided by my own judgment. Your espionage has borne its fruits; and you have surprised me here in company with this child who calls me her mother. You now know what you ought to think of me; what more do you ask? Do you hope that I shall try to vindicate myself, or that I am going to ask your forgiveness for a crime I have not committed? No, monsieur; I will not stoop so low. I was willing to tell you the truth, but I bitterly repent of it now, for I have placed the life of a woman I love at your mercy. You think I am telling a falsehood. Very well; I shall not attempt to convince you to the contrary. Forget me, and if you have any heart, keep the secret I was weak enough to reveal to you—keep it out of compassion for Madame Larmor."

"Why do you waste so many words? You know very well that I shall not betray her to her husband; but I may as well warn you that my silence will not save her from his wrath. If you don't believe me, ask the colonel to describe the scene he witnessed only this morning."

Sigoulès did not wait for Madame de Marcenac to question him. "Madame," he said, with sincere emotion, "it seems to be my fate to annoy you and bring you evil tidings, although I feel the deepest sympathy for you." And thereupon the colonel described the scene which had taken place that morning at the Continental Hôtel—detailing the conversation between Monsieur and Madame Larmor, La Cadière's arrival and his talk, and the husband's outburst and challenge.

"What! a duel!" murmured Madame de Marcenac.

"Oh, the duel did not take place," rejoined Sigoulès. "La Cadière beat a hasty retreat; and the husband took me to task for his disappearance. I was not inclined to stand any nonsense, however, and he soon quieted down into a more sensible frame of mind. He then asked me to act as his second, but I told him I would have nothing to do with the affair. He afterwards attempted to say something about you; but I cut the conversation short, and left him standing there."

"And you have heard nothing more about the affair?"

"No, madame."

"And you think that this wretch, La Cadière, will not fight?"

"I am sure he will not, unless Monsieur Larmor compels him to do so; but that is exactly what I think he will do. He knows the viscount's name, for I gave it him. He also knows that the scoundrel is staying at the Continental, and unless the viscount runs away, Monsieur Larmor will be sure to find him. But the viscount is a coward, and I would willingly wager that he will manage in some way or other to avoid fighting."

"I hope you are right!"

"But I should like to be mistaken, madame, for I am anxious for him to accept the challenge."

"Do you desire the death of my unfortunate friend, then?"

"No, certainly not; but I should be delighted if her husband could kill Monsieur de la Cadière, whom I consider to be a vile knave; but if, on the contrary, Monsieur Larmor were killed——"

"Finish the sentence, sir, if you please."

"Well, in that case, Madame Larmor would be a widow, and there would be nothing to prevent her from acknowledging her daughter."

"Then you believe that she is Bertha's mother?" asked Madame de Marcenac.

"Yes," replied Sigoulès, glancing at his friend.

Paul was, perhaps, tempted to add: "I, also, believe so;" but to the countess he merely said: "I should be glad to think so."

"Continue to suspect me," Madame de Marcenac replied, coldly. "I shall not try to dispel your doubts. You do not trust me. That is quite enough to make me sever the bond which united us."

"Then you never loved me?"

"Whether I ever loved you or not matters little now. If I did love, I love you no longer, for I know you now; and if I should marry you after what has occurred, our wedded life would be unspeakably wretched. I give you back your freedom, and demand mine. Farewell!"

"You dismiss me?"

"I am going to rejoin—my daughter," replied the countess, bitterly.

And, with a cold bow to Sigoulès, she walked towards the house where little Bertha was awaiting her.

"Come," said Paul, impatiently pulling his companion towards the gate by which they had entered.

Sigoulès shrugged his shoulders, as if to say that he could do nothing more, and allowed himself to be hurried away without uttering a word. Paul rushed down the steps, and the two friends soon found themselves in the Rue Gabrielle, where, in their secret hearts, they began to wish they had remained.

"Well," cried the colonel, "are you any better satisfied now? You have quarrelled for good with a charming woman who loved you and who, I am sure, loves you still."

"Say rather with a monster of pride and hypocrisy," retorted Paul, angrily. "Even if I were sure that the child was not hers, I would never forgive her for having openly defied me."

"The very fact that she scorned to humble herself before you is, to me, conclusive proof of her innocence. If she had been guilty, she would not have shown so much pride."

"You reason like a magistrate; but you are not in love with her, and so you don't realise that if she had given me the slightest encouragement, I should have fallen at her feet."

"I could see that plainly enough; but I am very much afraid that it is all over between you. You have missed your opportunity; and it is not at all likely that another will ever present itself. What are you going to do now?"

"Nothing, except to try to forget her. If I don't succeed, I shall go to Monaco, and ruin myself there."

"I can't say that I approve of that way of diverting your mind. Will you leave the affair to me? Perhaps there is still time for me to arrange matters. I will, at least, attempt it, but only on conditions that you don't interfere."

"Do whatever you like; only please don't mention her name to me again."

"Very well; I promise. Now, can you secure my admission to the club where we met *La Cadière*?"

"Certainly, without the slightest difficulty; you can be a member in less than twenty-four hours, if you wish it."

"Propose my name at once, then. Your brougham is waiting for us at the foot of the hill. Will you do me the favour to take me back to the hotel? I am anxious to return there as soon as possible."

"You shall be there in twenty minutes," replied Paul, casting one more wistful look at the garden where he had so ruthlessly destroyed his last remaining chance of happiness.

## XI.

MANY years ago, when the Place Royale was the favourite rendezvous of the noblemen and ladies of the French Court, the Marais was the gayest and noisiest quarter of Paris, whereas it is now-a-days the quietest and most antiquated. The Rue St. Antoine, by which it is traversed, is a greatly frequented thoroughfare, no doubt, but the adjacent streets are mostly deserted. Drays, cabs, and omnibuses roll along those between

the Place Royale and the Place du Château d'Eau, but the real Marais is not here. It consists of the long quadrangle formed by the Rue Saint Antoine, the Boulevard Bourdon, the Quai des Celestins, and the Rue des Nonnains d'Hyères. It is a secluded, almost forgotten nook—a chip of the old block, a fragment of bygone Paris—indeed, the only quarter of the city which has escaped demolition and the innovations of modern life.

The most lonely, dismal, and silent of all its silent streets is certainly the Rue des Lions, which runs from the Rue Saint Paul to the Rue Beaufort. It is not of the slightest use; and one cannot help wondering why it was ever built. It seems more than probable that it owed its existence entirely to chance, when the French kings removed from their palace of the Marais to the Louvre. Nevertheless, people live in the Rue des Lions, and among the number may be mentioned M. Jules Chardin, the friend of the late M. Plantier. Attended by a servant-woman, who came every morning and went home at night, free from all pecuniary anxiety, satisfied with the present, and without fear concerning the future, this old tradesman led a life of complete independence. Rising every morning with the sun, he went down into his garden—for he had a garden—just as he had gone to his counting-house every morning in former years. Watering his flowers or pruning his trees kept him busy until the breakfast hour. At noon precisely, he repaired to a modest café in the Rue du Petit Musc, where he read the papers and played a game of chess with an old friend living in the Rue de la Cerisaie; and then he strolled to the Quai des Celestins to bask in the sun—that is, when there was any sun to bask in. At six o'clock he returned home to dine; at nine o'clock he went to bed, and regularly half-an-hour afterwards he was sleeping the sleep of the just.

The only variation in this programme consisted in occasional visits to Madame de Marcenac, for whom M. Chardin felt a reverential love akin to worship. Indeed, she was the only person in whom he took any interest. During a financial crisis her father had rendered him one of those pecuniary services which save an insolvent merchant from ruin. Now, Chardin's bump of gratitude was largely developed. He never forgot that Plantier had lent him a helping hand, and he showed his gratitude by taking his advice on all occasions, by proclaiming his merits everywhere, and by aiding not a little in his election to the office of President of the Chamber of Commerce. He obtained an interest in Plantier's business also, though he was only a silent partner; but he was well informed concerning the transactions of the firm; and Basfroi, the other partner, who knew him well, had great confidence in his judgment.

Basfroi's retirement and Plantier's death broke up the little circle; but Chardin transferred to Madame de Marcenac all the affection which he had entertained for her father—sympathising with all her joys and sorrows, serving her in every possible way, and ready to make any sacrifice for her. He had not yet, however, found an opportunity of making any great one, and it seemed scarcely probable that his devotion would ever be put to the test.

Bertha, however, was no ingrate; and, in spite of the difference in their ages, education, and habits, the Countess de Marcenac was sincerely attached to this old man who knew nothing about the customs of fashionable society, and who was more frequently tiresome than amusing. She always welcomed him cordially, listened to his long and prosy stories of commercial magnates with untiring patience, and made as much of him as if he had been a rich uncle whose property she coveted. She

always inquired about his health with the greatest solicitude; if he caught merely a slight cold, she sent her physician to see him, and not a week passed but what her cook prepared certain succulent dishes to which the old fellow was partial—for an undue love for the good things of the table was his besetting sin.

Such, then, was the man who, on leaving Madame de Marcenac's house one Saturday afternoon, met the Baron de Lizy in the garden, and learned from him of Basfroi's tragical death. Chardin had held Basfroi in but slight esteem, since the latter had begun to practise usury on a large scale, and he had often remonstrated with him in the most earnest manner. He had even stopped visiting him for some little time, and M. Plantier had been obliged to exert all his influence to effect a reconciliation. However, after all, Basfroi had a perfect right to do as he saw fit; and Basfroi, while he was Plantier's partner, had shared the common risk incurred in succouring Chardin. Besides, Madame de Marcenac had remained on excellent terms with him even after her father's and husband's death. Chardin felt that it would not do for him to be more scrupulous than the countess; and, moreover, the usurer and he were congenial in many of their tastes—they were both fond of solitude, and had the same opinions on many subjects.

So Chardin was sincerely grieved by the news of Basfroi's death; besides, it came upon him so suddenly that he was completely overwhelmed. Basfroi had paid him a visit but a week before, and they had had a long conversation together concerning Madame de Marcenac. Chardin might, therefore, expect to be examined by the investigating magistrate, and he contemplated the probable consequences of the tragic event with terror.

Nothing in the world could have induced him to inform the countess of the murder, and feeling sure that M. de Lizy would do so without delay, he himself kept perfectly quiet. The mere thought of being summoned before a magistrate made Chardin's flesh creep, although he had little or nothing on his conscience, and so, as soon as he reached home, he shut himself up, not even venturing out to the café in the Rue du Petit Musc. He hoped that his existence would be forgotten, for he had the simplicity to believe in the success of the manœuvre so common with the ostrich, which buries its head in the sand and imagines that no one can see it.

But after some hours of reflection, the ex-tradesman began to blame himself for having hastened off as soon as M. de Lizy had apprised him of Basfroi's death. He (Chardin) ought to have broken the news to the Countess de Marcenac, and have consulted with her as to what course to pursue if they were subjected to an official examination. He might also have given her a deal of valuable information, for he knew far more about Basfroi's business affairs than she did. It was positively an act of cowardice that he had committed by deserting her thus when she most needed him, leaving her to struggle alone amid terrible fears and perplexities.

After deliberating for a long time, the old fellow became ashamed of his pusillanimity, and decided to emerge from his seclusion, and repair to the Faubourg Saint Honoré. It would merely be the work of forty minutes; for he was a rapid walker, and at the hour he selected he was comparatively sure of finding Madame de Marcenac at home and alone. He was about to put on his overcoat before sallying forth, when he suddenly heard the sound of carriage wheels in the street outside. The

appearance of a vehicle is quite an event in the Rue des Lions, and Chardin, greatly surprised, paused to listen. To his intense astonishment, the vehicle drew up at the door of his own house. Such a thing had never previously happened since he had lived there; and this mere fact of a carriage stopping before his door, trifling as it would have seemed elsewhere, overwhelmed him so completely that he said to himself: "They have come to arrest me!"

Fortunately his terror was of short duration; for, a moment later, his servant entered the room carrying a card, upon which the name of the Countess de Marcenac was inscribed. Chardin breathed freely once more. He particularly desired to see the countess, and she had saved him the trouble of repairing to her residence.

"I was just going to your house!" he exclaimed, as Bertha entered the room—hoping by this statement to check the volley of reproaches he anticipated.

"I have been expecting you for three days past," replied the countess, rather coldly. "You surely cannot be ignorant that our poor friend, Basfroi, has been assassinated. But let us say no more about that now. I have come to ask your advice, and also a favour of you."

"It is granted, my dear Bertha, whatever it may be. What do you wish me to do?"

"I will tell you presently; but, first of all, give me your opinion about the position in which I am placed. This morning I spent an hour in the office of a magistrate at the Palais de Justice."

"Good heavens! Have they dared to accuse you?"

"Not openly; but by the manner in which I was questioned I could see that they suspect me; and I am not so much surprised, for they showed me a copy of our friend's will, by which he bequeaths his entire property to me."

"Yes; I knew that such was his intention; but even if he has done so, it does not follow that——"

"This document was the only paper the assassin left in the safe. So the authorities conclude that he was mindful of my interests, and that I must therefore know him. I denied any knowledge of the affair, but I am almost sure that the magistrate did not believe me, for he gave me to understand that he meant to investigate the circumstances of my connection with Basfroi."

"The connection was only natural; Basfroi had been your father's partner, and he had known you from your infancy, so why should he not leave you his fortune, if he wished to, as he had no near relatives?"

"He did not forget you in his will. For although I am the sole legatee, I am to pay you an annuity of twelve thousand francs."

"Then I, too, have cause for anxiety," exclaimed Chardin, in dismay. "The authorities know my name, and they will soon find out where I live."

"They already know that; I told them; but I added that you were the most honest man of my acquaintance."

"Worse and worse. They will imagine that we are in league with each other. I don't need this annuity, and I shall not accept it."

"Then you will decline to benefit by this will?"

"Yes; shall you also decline?"

"It is upon that very point I came to consult you, my friend."

"It is a serious matter. Basfroi must have a balance of more than two

millions at the bank. I know you are rich, my dear Bertha, very rich, in fact; still, an inheritance of this importance deserves consideration."

"The amount makes no difference; the question is simply this: Would not a refusal to accept the legacy be misinterpreted? Wouldn't the authorities believe that I sacrificed this fortune to convince them of my innocence?"

"That's true; I had not thought of that; and I am in the same dilemma as yourself, for I may be accused as well."

"But, on the other hand, it is perhaps dangerous to accept. We must consider the question carefully. And we must lose no time in preparing our plan of defence, in case these absurd suspicions should take the form of a formal accusation. Before all, we must try to discover the real culprit, and I hope you will assist me in finding him."

"I should like nothing better; but how?"

"Basfroi lent out money, did he not?"

"Alas! yes; and not in a strictly honourable way, I am sorry to say. I often reproached him for it, but it did no good. When he was in business with your father he wouldn't have cheated any man out of a penny, but he had his own peculiar views on the subject of money-lending."

"In other words, he was a usurer. The magistrate took good care to tell me so, and this is another reason why I feel inclined to renounce the legacy. The people to whom he lent his money were not all honest, I suppose?"

"No; there were several dishonest merchants, ruined libertines, and professional gamblers among them."

"And ruined noblemen, like the Count de Marcenac."

"That is true; your husband at one time owed Basfroi several hundred thousand francs."

"Which he repaid out of my dowry, as I know perfectly well. But since his death others have borrowed large sums from our friend; and I am almost certain that Basfroi was murdered by one of his debtors."

"That is probable. But which debtor was it?"

"Pray remark that all the notes were taken from the safe. The will alone was left, and I am quite sure this was done intentionally, as the thief must have been aware of its contents, for the envelope was torn open. The scoundrel undoubtedly left it in the hope that I should be accused of the crime. And so he must be an enemy."

"Is it possible that you, so generous and kind-hearted, have any enemies?"

"It is certain that I have one, and I think I know who he is. But I should very much like to know if he owed Basfroi any money. Our friend sometimes talked to you about his business matters, did he not?"

"He frequently did so, and he was here only a week ago, when he also spoke of you, of the affection he felt for you, and of his desire to see you married again to some man who would make you happy——"

"Did he mention the names of any persons who were indebted to him?"

"Yes; he mentioned the names of several whose solvency seemed doubtful to him, and, curiously enough, as if he had some presentiment of what was going to happen to him, he gave me a list of his most important and doubtful debtors—a list written out by himself with the amount of each loan, and the day on which it would fall due."

"Did you preserve this list?" asked the countess, eagerly.

"Certainly; and I will show it to you. It is a very long one, and there are several amounts after some of the names. Basfroi thought I might be able to give him some information about certain persons named in it—persons who figure prominently in fashionable circles of which I know nothing whatever, and in clubs where I have never set foot. I told him he came to a bad place for such information, as I could not be of the slightest use to him."

"Do you recollect whether he mentioned the name of a Monsieur de la Cadière?" interrupted Madame de Marcenac.

"The Viscount de la Cadière?" repeated M. Chardin. "Yes; Basfroi often spoke of him. He had known him for years, and he was one of his best clients—best, in the sense of paying a heavier rate of interest than the others; but Basfroi had no confidence in him."

"Do you mean that he doubted the viscount's ability to meet his obligations?"

"Yes; this fellow had always met his notes on the day they became due; but Basfroi was tormented by a fear that he would be missing some fine morning. Our friend knew that the viscount played heavily, and that his antecedents were extremely disreputable, to say the least. If I were not afraid of wounding you, I would add that Monsieur de la Cadière was at one time quite intimate with the Count de Marcenac."

"That is no news to me. My husband introduced him to me, but before a month elapsed, I was obliged to close my doors against him. I have met him but once since; that was in Basfroi's office at Fontainebleau, and he did not dare to address a word to me. I despise him, and I am quite sure that he detests me."

"BASFROI also despised him, and told me recently that he had made up his mind to have no further dealings with him. The viscount still owed him a large amount, and Basfroi was very much afraid that it would never be paid."

"When would that note have become due?"

"I must consult the list to be able to answer you."

"Let us go to your room at once, then."

"But, my dear Bertha, do you really suspect Monsieur de la Cadière of the murder? He is a hard customer, I admit; but——"

"A man who would do what he has done is capable of any crime. Besides, he has several reasons for hating me. No one else would have thought of leaving the will in the safe so that suspicion might fall on me, and if—as I am firmly convinced—BASFROI was murdered by one of his debtors, that debtor can have only been Monsieur de la Cadière. The main thing is to ascertain when Monsieur de la Cadière's note fell due."

"Then you think that to escape paying it, he——"

"The magistrate who just examined me told me what must have taken place in Basfroi's office; he also told me that the murder must have been committed by some person our friend was expecting, for he would not have opened his door to a stranger at ten o'clock at night."

"Oh, no! for he was very cautious and exceedingly suspicious."

"So he must have had some business with this man, some money transaction, unquestionably, as he opened his safe. The latter shows no sign of having been broken open, and the letters of the word which had to be spelled to open it were in their right places. It seems, too, that this word was my name—*Bertha*. The magistrate told me so."



"I knew it," muttered Chardin. "Basfroi told me so himself, and I remarked that it was very appropriate."

"But the murderer could not have known the word ; so Basfroi must have opened the safe, either for the purpose of putting in or taking out some money. And it was then, probably, while he had his back turned, that the murderer sprang upon him. He no doubt shrieked for aid, but no one came to the rescue ; he was old, and unable to struggle successfully against a young and vigorous man. At last he lost his footing, and the scoundrel strangled him."

"It is horrible, horrible !" faltered M. Chardin ; "and when I think that a similar fate might have befallen me——"

"Then the murderer proceeded to examine the contents of the safe," continued the countess, without noticing this naively egotistical comment. "He removed all the promissory notes from the portfolio, and took them away with him in order to destroy them. He also opened the envelope containing the will, and after reading the will he replaced it in the portfolio, took possession of all the gold and bank-notes in the safe, and fled."

"Did no one catch a glimpse of him ?"

"Yes ; he was seen as he leapt from the window ; but he succeeded in escaping his pursuers. Basfroi usually gave up business at five o'clock ; but suppose one of his clients was a few hours behindhand in the payment of a large amount, and this client wrote to him, 'Give me until this evening to meet my engagement,' in that case wouldn't he have made an exception, and admitted him after office hours ?"

"I think so ; especially as Basfroi was not in the habit of sending out his clients' notes for collection when they became due. As the manner in which he conducted his business was rather irregular, he preferred to dispense with the services of agents in collecting them. He never put these promissory notes in circulation, but kept them locked up in his safe. People who borrow money at unlawful rates of interest,\* don't like the fact to be known ; and with Basfroi they were sure that their notes would not be flaunted through the streets. The day before the notes fell due, he apprised his clients of the fact, and requested them to call upon him, and either meet their obligations or renew the notes ; and if they failed to make their appearance by noon on the following day, he sent the notes to a lawyer."

"Well, suppose that Monsieur de la Cadière said, in reply to this warning, 'I shall not be prepared to-morrow morning ; but I will bring you your money to-morrow evening,' what would have been the result ?"

"Basfroi would, no doubt, have waited for him. He had resolved to lend the viscount no more money ; but he would not have missed an opportunity to recover the amount already due without being obliged to resort to legal proceedings, which were almost certain to result disastrously for himself. Although he meant to have no further dealings with Monsieur de la Cadière, he wished to take advantage of a moment when that gentleman could pay, Monsieur de la Cadière's solvency being of an intermittent nature. One day he is rolling in gold ; the next he has not a penny. This is the case with all gamblers. It was of the greatest possible importance to the viscount to maintain his credit with Basfroi, and prevent his note from being protested, so——"

---

\* By French law, in money-lending no interest is legal above 5 per cent.—TRANS

"So he wrote to Basfroi promising to call on him at ten o'clock that evening, and Basfroi must have believed that Monsieur de la Cadière really intended to meet the note. Now, all that I am anxious to know is, whether one of this scoundrel's notes really fell due on the 7th of March ; so show me the list, and when I have satisfied my doubts on this point, I will tell you the service I require of you."

Chardin bitterly regretted his allusion to the dangerous paper in his possession ; but he dared not oppose Madame de Marcenac, and, moreover, he felt the justice of her reasoning. He escorted her to his bed-room, gave her a chair, and after satisfying himself that the servant was not listening at the door, opened his escritoire, where he had no difficulty in finding the desired document.

Madame de Marcenac took it, gave it a hasty glance, and then placing her finger upon one of the lines, held out the paper to her old friend : "Look !" she exclaimed, triumphantly.

"It is a fact," replied Chardin, reading aloud. "'March 7th. Monsieur le Vicomte de la Cadière, Continental Hôtel, Paris : thirty thousand francs, in payment for three drafts of ten thousand francs each.'"

"And our friend has appended this note," added the countess : "'To be placed in the lawyer's hands at noon on March 8, in case of non-payment.'"

"That doesn't surprise me," said Chardin. "BASFROI did not care to retain Monsieur de la Cadière's patronage, and he had decided to show him no mercy. I recollect that in speaking of this gentleman, he told me he had warned him that he need not count upon a renewal this time."

"Then there is not the shadow of a doubt. La Cadière was in no condition to settle his account, and the threat of suing him prompted the atrocious plan of murdering Basfroi. Having destroyed the notes he had given Basfroi, la Cadière fancied he was safe. He did not imagine that Basfroi had given you a list of his debtors ; and I am satisfied that when the magistrate sees this list, he will order the scoundrel's immediate arrest."

M. Chardin hung his head, and did not reply.

"Go at once to the magistrate — the one at Fontainebleau, I mean—" said the countess, "and give him this paper. He will surely notice the name of the debtor whose notes fell due on March 7, and ask you for some information about him. Tell him all you know. Tell him that Basfroi had a very poor opinion of Monsieur de la Cadière ; that he did not expect the notes would be paid when due, and that he was determined to sue him without delay. I am positive that when the magistrate knows the truth about this pretended nobleman, he will at once issue a warrant for his arrest. Will you do what I ask, my friend ?"

"Certainly, if you desire it," replied Chardin, mournfully. "But had you not better speak to Monsieur de Lizy about it first ?"

"Do you attach so much value to his opinion ?" said the countess, scornfully.

"I confess that I like him very much, and it seems to me that you will never find a husband who will suit you better. He is very good-looking ; well off ; with a title, and an excellent disposition, if I am any judge. Besides, he loves you."

"I know nothing about that ; but I do know very well that I don't love *him*, and that I shall never marry him."

"I thought you had decided to do so."

"Possibly I had, for I thought him a man of honour, but I have hanged my mind."

"Has he done anything that proves him to be unworthy of your respect?"

"He has played the spy on me, after subjecting my best friend to the same espionage."

"A spy! he, the Baron de Lizy! If any one else had told me such a thing, I would not have believed it."

"What I have said is true, I swear it, and this shameful behaviour has had the most deplorable consequences, not for myself, for I am independent. Monsieur de Lizy will perhaps succeed in destroying my reputation by his conduct; but I am accountable to no one. However, the friend I spoke of is married, and her husband is insanelly jealous, and has a violent temper. Well, thanks to Monsieur de Lizy, the husband, who has, so far, acted on the best possible terms with his wife, now thinks that she has deceived him, and that she is the mother of a child whose birth she has concealed from him."

"What! The baron has acted the part of an informer! That is certainly unworthy of him."

"No, not exactly; some other person denounced my friend, and I strongly suspect that the informer was Monsieur de la Cadière. However, by a complication of circumstances, which I have neither the time nor inclination to explain to you, the poor woman I once succeeded in saving from her husband's fury is again in danger of death; and this time it is all Monsieur de Lizy's fault."

"In danger of death!" exclaimed Chardin; "why, her husband must be a little better than a wild beast!"

"He began by locking up his wife, and threatening her, swearing he would first kill her lover, and then inflict the same punishment on herself."

"Persons make such threats, but seldom carry them into execution."

"But I am sure that he will do so. I am not at all anxious to prevent him from killing the scoundrel he accuses of having been his wife's lover; but I will not allow him to harm my friend."

"My dear Bertha, I cordially approve of this resolve, and it won't be difficult to prevent the madman from committing a crime. There are laws to protect a husband's rights, but there are also laws to prevent husbands from meting out punishment themselves. If I were in your place, I would go straight to a commissary of police and explain the situation to him."

"It would be useless. The commissary wouldn't arrest a man merely because somebody accused him of intending to commit a crime, and an almost excusable one; besides, my friend has succeeded in making her escape."

"So much the better!" exclaimed the worthy man.

"She has taken refuge at my house," continued Madame de Marcenac.

"That is very unfortunate. If this madman learns it, and comes to our house in search of his wife, think what a scandal the affair would create!"

"I care nothing about the scandal," replied the countess, bitterly; "but I fear that I shan't be able to protect my friend; so I cannot and will not keep her in my house."

"That is a very sensible decision. If you need my advice, I should recommend getting her out of the country as soon as possible."

"It will probably come to that finally ; but it cannot be done just now, for many reasons."

"The husband is already watching your house, perhaps?"

"Possibly ; but there are other reasons which render such an attempt out of the question at present. However it is not your advice I desire, but a favour which our long friendship warrants me in asking."

"A favour ! Speak, my dear Bertha. I am ready to do anything you ask. You know I would go through fire and water for you."

"That would be asking too much," replied Madame de Marcenac, smiling. "I only ask you to shelter my poor friend."

"What ! here !" exclaimed M. Chardin.

"Yes ; in this house, where no one will ever think of looking for her. You are the only person I can trust."

"But, my dear Bertha, the lady would not be safe here ; the whole neighbourhood would soon know she was in my house. You have no idea what inquisitive, gossiping people the inhabitants of the Marais are. It would create such a commotion that the authorities would soon hear of it, and inform the husband. If he came to claim her, what could I do ? I am an old man, and should be no match for him if he resorted to violence."

"You need have no fears of that. I have taken every precaution. No one will suspect that my friend is here ; besides, she will not be obliged to remain long."

"If she spends but a single night here, it will be too much ; everybody will know it the next day. Besides, how could you get her here ? The noise of the carriage in which you came has set all the people in the street talking and watching already."

"I doubt it ; but, however that may be, you need feel no further anxiety on that score. My friend came with me."

"What do you mean ?" exclaimed M. Chardin, who had changed countenance on hearing this announcement.

"I mean that my friend is in the vehicle that brought me here," replied Madame de Marcenac, coldly. "In spite of what you say, no one ran to the windows to see our carriage pass, and I took the precaution to tell the driver to stop a short distance from the house. The blinds of the vehicle were pulled down, and as I thought I should be admitted by a servant, I left my friend inside, instead of bringing her here with me. But your servant has gone now, and my friend has already been kept waiting too long."

Chardin was so overcome with consternation that he could hardly stammer out his objections to the arrangement, although Madame de Marcenac heard some allusion to the inconveniences to which the lady would be subjected.

"You can hardly be in earnest," she replied drily. "My friend will find no fault with the accommodation you offer her ; besides, I hope that her stay here will be very short. I intend to make arrangements at once to enable her to get safely out of France."

"But, my dear Bertha, I repeat that it will be impossible for me to conceal this lady. My servant will return in a few hours to prepare my dinner, and she will see her."

"But even if she saw her, what difference could it possibly make ?"

"You don't know her. She is an inveterate gossip, and it would not be of the slightest use for me to tell her to be silent."

"Then dismiss her at once."

"That would be even worse. She would guess why I sent her away, and would spread the news everywhere. She is quite capable of denouncing me as a conspirator, and saying that I shut myself up here to manufacture dynamite. In times like these a man cannot be too prudent, for such charges are heard everywhere. Besides, if I send my servant away, who will wait on the lady?"

"She will wait on herself. You can take your meals at a restaurant, and bring her something to eat when you return. But perhaps you will tell me that there is only one bed in the house."

"That is true; there is but one. You see, I live alone, and——"

"You will, of course, give it up to my friend. She can take your room, and you can sleep on the floor above. You can sleep very comfortably for two or three nights on a mattress, or even in an arm-chair."

Chardin, who could think of no other objections, hung his head and looked the picture of despair. His silence and his attitude irritated Madame de Marcenac. "Do you still hesitate?" she asked, scornfully. "I had a better opinion of you. Will you compel me to remind you that my father rendered you an important service many years ago?"

"I assure you that I have not forgotten it."

"Perhaps not; but you act as if you had; for the first time I ask you to prove your gratitude you decline, giving ridiculous reasons for your refusal."

"My dear Bertha, don't reproach me, I beseech you! Remember that I am old, and accustomed to a quiet life. The mere thought of having anything to do with a magistrate makes me shudder."

"Do you also wish to be released from your promise to take the list of Basfroi's debtors to the magistrate?"

"Oh, no! I will do that, much as I dread the task. But after I have done it, I shall be watched, and your friend won't be safe here, for I may receive a visit from a detective at any moment."

"More excuses!" exclaimed the countess, rising. "You ought to blush to hesitate like that. But, as you lack courage, I will supply it. I am determined—do you understand?—I am determined that you shall shelter my friend here, and I am going for her now. I am going for her, I tell you; and when she is once here, we will see if you will dare to send her away!"

"No, oh, no! I would rather leave my house!"

"Leave it, then, and go to mine and stay there if you like; but give my friend shelter; I myself will watch over her, as you are too much of a coward to protect her."

"Too much of a coward!" repeated Chardin, dolefully.

"Yes; for it is certainly cowardly to refuse help to an unfortunate woman whom a furious man is hunting down to kill her. If you close your doors against her, you doom her to certain death. I know of no other place where she will be safe. So you must receive her, and do it with a good grace, if only to convince me that you are not wholly destitute of heart."

There were tears in the old man's eyes. Madame de Marcenac had wounded him at his most vulnerable point by accusing him of ingratitude, for he never forgot a kindness; and if he loved any one in the world, it was certainly the daughter of the man who had saved him from bankruptcy. But the sacrifice she asked of him was enormous. He would have to renounce his old habits, and change the methodical life he had led so long.

"You are crying," said the countess, "so that you realise that it would be shameful to refuse. Your distress really touches me, and though I was harsh just now, I can now speak in a different manner. You are kind-hearted, I know; you have never seen any one suffer without being touched by their misery. Forget what I said, and view the situation calmly. It is to your compassion that I appeal. My friend knows she is lost if you don't grant her the hospitality I have promised her in your name. She is now enduring the most cruel suspense. Will you leave her to suffer thus?"

"No!" exclaimed Chardin, excited by the eloquence of the countess; "no; it shall not be said that I ever closed my door against an unfortunate woman. My house, my fortune, my life, are all hers; and if her husband should attempt to molest her, I will give him such a reception that he won't try it again. Now, my dear Bertha, what am I to do? Command me; I will obey."

Madame de Marcenac could not help smiling at this bellicose speech, which had so closely followed a fit of abject fear. She deemed it advisable to take immediate advantage of the impulse, for fear that Chardin's enthusiasm might speedily abate. "Come down with me, my friend," she said. "You must open the street door for me, and leave it unlocked. A moment or two afterwards I will bring you my friend."

"Take her into the garden," said the old man, who, perhaps, still clung to a hope of escaping the threatened ordeal. "We can talk better there."

"Certainly, if you prefer it," replied the countess, who had risen after carefully replacing in the *escritoire* the list of Basfroi's debtors. Chardin locked the *escritoire*, and then accompanied Bertha to the door.

In a few moments she returned, leading by the hand a lady who was dressed in black, and whose face was hidden by a thick veil. To Chardin this veiled woman seemed a spectre risen from the grave; and although he was ashamed of his weakness, he could not overcome it. When the ladies had approached to within a few steps of him, he made an awkward bow, but he was utterly unable to stammer out even a few words of greeting suited to the occasion. The stranger lifted her veil, disclosing features haggard with suffering, but bearing traces of beauty which had once been remarkable.

Her emaciated cheeks were pale, and her eyes, swollen with weeping, looked timidly at the aged man who had promised her his hospitality. Chardin was deeply moved, but he said nothing; for the very good reason that he did not know what to say: so it was the countess who broke the embarrassing silence. "Monsieur Chardin," she said, gently, "this is the friend whom I confide to your protection, and who will owe her life to you. The present is one of those exceptional times which compel persons to rise above ordinary formalities; so I shall now only present her to you by her Christian name, which is Gabrielle. You will also excuse me from telling you her husband's name; for, if I did, you would incur a weighty responsibility; but you have a perfect right to assist a woman who is in imminent danger of death, without asking who she is. You open your house to a fugitive—to a persecuted woman—and you can plead ignorance as to why she has been compelled to seek an asylum with you."

"I am proud and happy to offer it to her," now replied Chardin, drawing himself up complacently. "My house is inviolable, and so long as madame deigns to occupy it, she is perfectly safe. I will be responsible for her welfare, and I thank you, my dear Bertha, for having chosen me to protect her."

Chardin, like all bashful persons, did not know when to stop after he had once begun. The little introductory speech which Madame de Marcenac had just made to him had flattered him greatly. He was now highly elated at the idea of being of service to her, and he felt several inches taller since he had been appointed the protector of an interesting lady. He had entirely forgotten his excuses and protests, and imagined that he had greeted the proposal of the countess with prompt enthusiasm.

"Sir," said the strange lady, "if I escape the dangers that threaten me, the remainder of my life shall be devoted to proving you my gratitude. But I shall never be able to repay the obligation I contract by accepting the shelter you offer me, for you sacrifice your comfort and tranquillity for me, though I am but a stranger. Bertha did not exaggerate when she assured me that you were the best and most generous of men."

"I am only doing my duty, madame," replied Chardin, with feigned modesty.

"Your duty!" exclaimed Gabrielle. "Say rather that you are practising the most praiseworthy self-abnegation. I know who you are, sir; and how you are in the habit of living. But you do not shrink from the confusion and care my presence in your household will cause. Nothing could be more generous, and I assure you that I would not accept such a sacrifice if I did not hope that I should but for a short time abuse your kindness; however, while I am here, I wish to cause you as little trouble as possible. You must live exactly as if I were not here, and without making the slightest change in your habits."

Chardin was about to declare that he was ready to endure anything to ensure the safety of the persecuted lady, but the countess interposed. "My dear Gabrielle," said she, "it is unluckily impossible that your presence here should not inconvenience our friend a little. In the first place, he will be obliged to send his servant away, for she must not see you, as she is a great gossip."

"I will take her place," exclaimed Madame Larmor.

"Oh, madame!" protested Chardin, half offended.

"You are not strong enough to perform her duties," replied Madame de Marcenac; "nor is this all; he will be obliged to give up his bedroom to you."

"I will not consent to that," responded Gabrielle, earnestly.

"Would you deprive me of the pleasure of sacrificing a little of my comfort for your sake, madame?" interposed Chardin. "What credit should I deserve for entertaining you, if I was not inconvenienced? Give yourself no uneasiness whatever, I——"

"Let me see, my dear Chardin," said the countess, who rather distrusted the sincerity of these protestations, "is there not some other mode of arranging it? Are all the rooms on the second floor entirely unfurnished?"

Chardin, deeply ashamed of having told a falsehood in order to avoid a dreaded task, blushed, and scratched his head. "I forgot," he muttered, "that to be prepared in case poor Basfroi were detained over-night in Paris by business matters, I purchased a few chairs, a table, and bed, which I placed in the room directly over mine. This room has a window that overlooks the garden. You can see it from here, but——"

"That is all I need," said Gabrielle.

"You mustn't think of such a thing, madame. You, accustomed to every luxury, or, at least, to every comfort, occupy a room like that! If

you could only see it ! Basfroi was not fastidious, and it suited him very well ; it does well enough too for me, but you—you must take my room."

"I absolutely refuse to do so, and——"

"And I," interrupted Madame de Marcenac, "think that Gabrielle is right ; the arrangement she proposes is the best one under the circumstances."

"Oh, my dear Bertha, how can you say so ?" pleaded M. Chardin.

"My dear friend, if you had explained the situation better when we were talking together a few moments ago, I should have told you what could be done to prevent you from being annoyed by Gabrielle's presence, and to ensure her perfect safety in your house. To send away your servant and compel you to take your meals out of the house, are remedies worse than the disease. The woman would suspect what was going on, and as she would be furious with you for dismissing her without cause, she would try to solve the mystery, and our secret would probably be discovered."

"I ventured to call your attention to these objections, and——"

"Yes ; but I did not know that there was any habitable room on the second floor. That changes everything. Your servant does not go to that floor every day, I suppose ?"

"She never goes up there. The door leading upstairs is locked, and I keep the key in my secretary."

"In that case Gabrielle can stay up there, and no one will suspect that she is in the house. Keep your servant, and let her come, as usual, to prepare your meals ; only order rather more than you are in the habit of doing. Gabrielle can live upon the surplus, which you yourself can take to her as soon as the servant has gone. I will send here to-night, by a trusty messenger, the linen my friend will need, and some indispensable toilet articles. She will then be quite comfortable, only she will be obliged to make her own bed."

"We were all obliged to do that at school, you remember," replied Madame Larmor, "and I have not forgotten how."

Chardin was radiant, his wounded pride having been soothed by Bertha's affected belief that his falsehood as to the accommodation in the house had been entirely due to forgetfulness. "If madame can make herself comfortable in Basfroi's room," he said, "I think, with you, my dear Bertha, that this would be the safest arrangement. It would also be as well if madame would refrain from walking about too much in her room. The boards are not very thick, and my servant has remarkably sharp ears. It might also be best for madame to keep the shutters closed, as they have been ever since I resided here, for the neighbours know that I don't use that floor at all."

"I shall not feel the slightest desire to open them," responded Gabrielle.

"I am too much afraid of being seen by the person who is looking for me."

"Well, my dear Chardin, everything is settled," said Bertha. "Will you kindly show us to the room you intend for my friend ? I am anxious to settle her there without delay, for we have not a minute to lose if we are to circumvent the villain whom we were speaking of a short time ago, Don't forget your promises," continued Madame de Marcenac. "You must take that list to the magistrate as soon as you possibly can." This reminder suddenly cooled Chardin's enthusiasm. His face clouded, and he was evidently trying to devise some way to escape the task, but the countess, who read his thoughts, gravely resumed : "I hope, my friend, that you don't think of breaking your word ?"



"Certainly not, certainly not, my dear Bertha," replied Chardin, nervously. "When I make a promise, I intend to keep it, and I will do whatever you wish; but I am in a very embarrassing position now that madame has accepted the very poor accommodation I could place at her disposal. If I go to Fontainebleau, I shall be obliged to leave her here unprotected, at the mercy of my servant, who has a perfect mania for roving about the house. Besides, wasn't it settled that I was to take her meals to her room?"

These objections were worthy of consideration, and Madame de Marcenac must have felt their weight, for she began to reflect. Madame Larmor stood awaiting her friend's decision, silent and resigned. She seemed to have lost all will of her own, and to have left everything to the countess and the worthy man who held her fate in his hands. "You are right," said Bertha, after a short pause, "Gabrielle cannot do without you, and we can postpone delivering the scoundrel up to justice for a few days, without any great danger. Perhaps it will be as well for you to have nothing to do with the authorities while my friend is in your house. I shall devote the remainder of the day to making arrangements for her departure, and I hope that by to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, she will be able to leave Paris, although this will depend upon an interview I am to have with a friend this evening."

"In any case, it will be safer for madame to leave the house at night when she does go," remarked Chardin.

"So she shall. I only brought her here in the daytime because it could not be avoided. Any delay was out of the question, as I expected a visit from her husband at any moment; and we were very fortunate to make our escape, for he is capable of stationing spies around my house. I shall come to take Gabrielle away between two and three o'clock in the morning, probably."

"Pray come on foot; vehicles make some noise; besides, they attract attention."

"Very well; but my coachman will be waiting for us on the Place de la Bastille, and he will drive us to a station some miles out of the city, where my friend can safely take the train. I shall make such arrangements as will ensure her a safe retreat, where she can spend several years very pleasantly."

"While she is here she has everything to fear," added Chardin, eagerly; for he had suddenly become more uncomfortable than ever about the possible consequences of his good deed.

"At what hour will your servant return?" asked the countess.

"She comes at about five o'clock to prepare my dinner."

"Then we have plenty of time to settle Gabrielle in her room. At what hour does the woman leave for the night?"

"A little after eight o'clock."

"Then I will send some one here about nine o'clock with the linen and toilet articles I spoke of."

"Don't let your messenger come any earlier than that. I will open the door myself; but it would be as well to agree upon some signal, for during this lady's stay I don't intend to admit any one but you, or some one sent by you, my dear Bertha."

"Very well; then let it be understood that my messenger will ring three times in quick succession."

"Good! then I shall know who it is, and I need not keep her waiting."

Now, if you like, I will show you upstairs. It would be better not to remain here any longer. I forgot to tell you that my servant has a key, and might return unexpectedly and take us by surprise."

"Well, lead the way, my friend. Gabrielle is quite ready to take possession of her apartment, and I cannot stay much longer, for there is some one waiting for me at home."

Chardin needed no urging, but promptly led the way; satisfying himself as he passed the street door that Madame de Marcenac had not neglected to lock it behind her. He first conducted the ladies into the room where he had received the countess, and which they were obliged to pass through to reach the second floor by a winding stairway, built in the wall, and so narrow that only one person could ascend it at a time. The house was very old indeed, and this staircase was like those found in the turrets of a mediæval château; it led to some low rooms, above which there was nothing but the roof.

Chardin had concealed the entrance to this staircase by a piece of antique tapestry, behind which there was a door which he kept locked and which was rarely opened, as the rooms above were not used three times in a year.

As they passed through Chardin's apartment, Madame de Marcenac pointed to the *escritoire* in which he kept Basfroi's list, and said: "Don't forget that you have there a sure means of avenging our friend. Whether you use it now or in two or three days is of little moment provided you do use it—and that you have sworn to do."

"I know it," replied Chardin, dolefully, "and I shall keep my promise. But I should like to see you again before taking the step, for events may occur which would greatly change the situation. As long as this lady remains under my roof, I shall lead the life of a hermit. No news from the outside world will reach me, for I take no papers, and if my servant had not happened to bring me one that the boys were selling in the street, I should still be ignorant of the fact that one of Basfroi's debtors was suspected of having murdered him."

"You are right; we must have another conference before you visit the magistrate, and nothing could be easier, for as soon as Gabrielle is in a place of safety, you and I will be free to come and go as we choose. Monsieur de Lizy is the only person who knows that you are a friend of mine, and Monsieur de Lizy no longer visits me. But let us go upstairs. Which way must we go?"

Chardin lifted the tapestry, drew a key from his pocket, and opened the door.

"What! a circular stairway!" exclaimed Madame de Marcenac. "So your house is built like a château of feudal times, with staircases in the walls! Why didn't you tell me? It seems to have been built for the express purpose of concealing fugitives! My poor Gabrielle happens to be the fugitive now. Make haste and conduct her to the hiding-place, where the furious man who has sworn to take her life will certainly not think of looking for her."

"If he gained admittance to the house he would have no difficulty in finding his way upstairs," muttered Chardin, who had not absolute confidence in the inviolability of his domicile.

"But he will not gain admittance," replied the countess. "Go up first; we will follow you."

Keeping close to the wall, the women climbed with some little difficulty

a score of steps, much worn by time ; and then followed their guide into a room where the close atmosphere at first caused a feeling of intolerable suffocation.

"It is a very shabby place, you see," murmured Chardin, apologetically.

"It needs air more than anything else," replied Madame de Marcenac.

"After the windows have been open a little while——"

"Unfortunately, it is not safe to open the windows on account of the neighbours."

"It will do very well," hastily interposed Madame Larmor, "and I am deeply grateful to you for the privilege of occupying it."

The furniture consisted of an iron bedstead, four cane-seated chairs, a pine wardrobe, and a wash-stand. The châtelaine of Bois le Roi had been accustomed to a much more comfortable apartment, but she had lost the right to be fastidious.

Madame de Marcenac took her aside, and after speaking a few words to her in a low tone returned to Chardin, and said, in a grave but affectionate manner : "Gabrielle will be very comfortable here. I entrust her to your care, and go away with my mind at ease ; for I know that I leave her in good hands. It is not necessary for you to go down with me. Gabrielle needs you here."

She shook hands with him without waiting for his reply, kissed Madame Larmor tenderly, and went off, leaving Chardin alone with his visitor.

He was not accustomed to such a delicate position, and he felt strongly tempted to run after Madame de Marcenac and entreat her not to leave so soon. Women had held no place in his laborious life. In his younger days he had been too poor to have any leisure to devote to them, and when he had accumulated a fortune, by dint of economy and industry, he felt no inclination to make up for lost time. His bashfulness and timidity had really become chronic. Women frightened him terribly, simply because he knew nothing at all about them. He regarded them, in fact, as malevolent creatures, born for the express purpose of weaving snares for honest men, and of luring them from the path of duty. Madame de Marcenac was the only lady with whom he was intimately acquainted ; but he had known her from her infancy, and the countess still seemed to him the little Bertha Plantier whom he had jogged upon his knee, and who had begged him for toys with wonderful success. She did not frighten him in the least. He was in the habit of talking to her freely. She had never taken offence when he had given her advice before her marriage with a ruined nobleman, and she had afterwards listened to him with equal deference.

Still this familiar intercourse had not taught him how to acquit himself creditably in a *tête-à-tête*, and he now found himself in an extremely embarrassing position. What should he say to a woman still young and pretty whose name he did not know, but whom the countess had placed in his charge ? Was he obliged to remain with her, and to try to entertain her, or would it be more agreeable to her for him to leave her entirely alone, and confine himself to providing for her temporal wants ? In short, ought he to deport himself as a host who is entertaining a guest of distinction, or content himself with serving her as a faithful domestic would have done ?

Many others, far more experienced than Chardin in worldly matters, would have been equally at a loss under such peculiar circumstances. However, the worthy old fellow seemed to have suddenly grown younger since entering upon his important duties. Vanity, probably, had some-

thing to do with the change, for he could with reason flatter himself that he was rendering Madame Larmor an important service. He moved about the room, pretending to be searching for sundry articles which might add to his visitor's comfort, not knowing whether to go or stay, and secretly hoping that she would speak to him.

Madame Larmor had meanwhile seated herself on one of the chairs, and there she remained silent and motionless, with her swollen eyes fixed upon vacancy. Her thoughts were evidently far away, and she seemed to have forgotten Chardin's existence. He finally coughed, to remind her of it, and, suddenly aroused from her reverie, she turned to him and said: "Forgive me, sir; I was so absorbed in my gloomy thoughts that I have neglected to thank you; but I beg you to believe that I fully realise the importance of the service you are rendering me. But for you, Heaven only knows what would have become of me!"

"What I have done is but a trifle in comparison with what I should like to do," exclaimed Chardin. "Madame de Marcenac might have safely asked far more of me; I was ready not only to conceal you, but to defend you."

"I do not doubt it, sir," replied Madame Larmor, with a furtive glance at her septuagenarian defender.

"If your husband dared to present himself here, he would find some one who is not afraid to tell him what he thinks of such conduct."

"May heaven avert his coming! I could submit uncomplainingly to the consequences of his anger, but I should be inconsolable if I brought his wrath down upon you! Pray, do exactly as if I were not in your house. I cannot live without eating, but a crust of bread will suffice me until Bertha comes to take me away."

"That would be altogether too little. You shall not be reduced to a prison diet here. I will see that you want for nothing; and if my presence does not annoy you, I shall be only too happy to come up occasionally and endeavour to divert your thoughts from your troubles."

"My troubles are not of a nature to be forgotten," murmured Gabrielle. "Thanks to you and Madame de Marcenac, I shall perhaps escape the vengeance of the man I have offended, but my happiness is ruined for ever; and I should greatly prefer death to the future that awaits me."

"Oh, madame, do not speak like that. At your age, one ought not to yield to despair. Your husband is pitiless it seems, but you may become a widow, and then——"

"I do not wish him to die; and I have no desire to live—I am too prostrated with grief and despair—I only tried to save myself because Bertha compelled me to do so. I should have preferred to submit to my fate."

"Is there no one in the world that you care for?"

"Yes, but I could die happy, for I know that my friend would always care for those I love. She has promised me that she would."

In great crises, the part of consoler is a difficult one to play, and Chardin, who had never had much experience in that character, soon found his stock of commonplaces exhausted. "You can rely on her promises," he replied, "Bertha is so kind-hearted. Alas! she has her troubles also! She has just broken an engagement which would have ensured her happiness, I am certain, and yet I don't even know her reasons; but they must be weighty ones, for the Baron de Lizy is a charming man."

"Bertha has often spoken of him, but I have never met him," responded Madame Larmor, evasively.

"Has she also told you of the terrible fate which has befallen poor Basfroi, her father's former partner?"

"I knew him, and his terrible death horrified me; it was so sudden!"

"Indeed, were you really acquainted with him?" inquired Chardin, with evident curiosity.

"My acquaintance with him was of long standing. It dated from the time I was at school with Bertha. In those same days I used to hear my friend mention your name very frequently. I recollect it very well."

"How strange, for I never heard her mention yours; and to-day, even, she did not think proper to disclose it."

Then, seeing Madame Larmor's head droop, the old fellow hastened to add—"Believe me, madame, I have no desire to know it. But, as you were acquainted with Basfroi, I am sure that it was to you he referred when he expressed to me his compassion for the fate of a married woman in whom he felt an interest, and who resided near Fontainebleau."

"Yes; I know he pitied me," murmured Madame Larmor, sadly.

"But God forbid that I should endeavour to pry into your secrets, madame. The great thing for all of us is that Basfroi's assassin should receive the punishment he deserves; and that is not far off."

"What! has the culprit been discovered?"

"I think so. Madame de Marcenac has put me on the track, and I have promised to denounce him to the authorities, supporting my accusation with proofs which will probably suffice to convict him. The assassin is, indeed, a man calling himself the Viscount de la Cadière. There is no question about it, at least, not in my mind. He is a mere adventurer."

"The Viscount de la Cadière! Is he the person you are going to denounce?"

"I am not anxious to do so; but it is Madame de Marcenac's wish, and I cannot refuse her."

"Promise me that you will not do so," cried Gabrielle, suddenly springing to her feet.

"What! do you take any interest in this scoundrel?"

"No; but I entreat you not to send him to the galleys or to the scaffold, and when I see Bertha——"

"Excuse me," Chardin interrupted, running to the top of the stairs to listen; "I thought that some one just opened the street door. Yes; I am not mistaken; I hear it shut again. It must be my servant, and yet, I don't understand why she should return so soon. Can she suspect that you are here? Whether she does or not, she must find me in my own room; so allow me to leave you. I will come up again as soon as I can get rid of her." As he spoke, the old man rushed down the stairs, reaching his room just in time.

His servant was not there; but she speedily made her appearance. She had merely forgotten to ask him for the market money. The reader may rest assured that Chardin did not keep her waiting. He soon succeeded in getting rid of her, but after her departure, he experienced fresh perplexities. "How strange!" he said to himself; "Bertha wishes Cadière to be convicted, and her friend wishes to save him! Who shall I obey? I feel strongly inclined to be guided by the proverb, which says—'When in doubt, do nothing.'"

## XII.

At five p.m., on the day after Gabrielle Larmor found a temporary refuge in Chardin's house, Colonel Sigoulès was sitting in front of the Café du Helder, on the Boulevard des Italiens. Since his arrival in Paris, the colonel had fallen into the pleasant habit of spending an hour every afternoon outside this establishment, which is the favourite meeting-place of military and naval officers in Paris. They meet there after years of absence; fraternise, talk, dine together, and then part—often never to meet again. It is a kind of halt between two campaigns, in which they exchange news concerning absent comrades and consult the army register. At the Helder, years ago, there was a head waiter—now the landlord of a stylish restaurant in a large provincial town—who knew all the promotions signed by the minister of war, long before they appeared in the *Moniteur de l'Armée*. He announced them in advance to the interested parties, and his predictions invariably proved correct. No one knew how he obtained his information, but he made a fortune by playing the prophet, and was able to set up in business on his own account.

Sigoulès, however, did not go to the Helder merely to meet his old friends, though he had several, for he had been very popular in all the regiments in which he had several; still less did he go there in the hope of further advancement, his promotion to the rank of lieutenant-colonel being too recent for him to aspire to anything higher for two or three years to come.

The great attraction of the place to him was the opportunity he had of contemplating the ambient, ever-changing throng which crowds the boulevard just before the dinner-hour. He liked to watch the hurrying crowd as it swept like a torrent along the asphalt—to guess the profession and social standing of each individual that passed—to stare at the women and smile at those he considered pretty.

On this particular day, however, his pleasure was greatly marred by anxiety, and he bestowed but little attention on the passers-by. He had returned from Montmartre firmly convinced that the countess was innocent, that his friend, Paul de Lizy, had made a great mistake in breaking off his engagement; and he longed to reconcile the lovers. He also dreamed of protecting this Madame Larmor whom he had unwittingly subjected to a terrible domestic scene, of the consequences of which he was still ignorant; for he had seen neither herself nor her husband since the eventful breakfast at the Continental Hôtel. He also longed to solve the mystery that enshrouded the murder of the Fontainebleau usurer, a crime which seemed to have been the starting point of Madame de Marcenac's misfortunes. To his mind the Viscount de la Cadière was the prime mover in all these intrigues. He it was who had accused the countess of complicity in the murder, who had compromised Madame Larmor, and had very probably strangled Basfroi. In that case he must be followed up and driven to the wall, and compelled to repair the evil he had wrought. But this was no easy matter. A scoundrel may be compelled to confess that he has slandered a lady; but it is well nigh impossible to force him to admit that he is guilty of murder, followed by robbery. Moreover, how was he, Sigoulès, to lay his hands on M. de la Cadière? He had made inquiries at the hotel before going out, and had learned that the viscount had not been

seen there since that eventful breakfast, and would probably never set foot there again ; for that same afternoon he had sent a man to settle his bill—a man who was probably a servant, as he had himself put the viscount's trunks on the cab in which he drove away.

M. de la Cadière having gone off without leaving his address, it was evident that he did not intend to give M. Larmor satisfaction ; and so it was only reasonable to suppose that he would feel even less inclined to accept a challenge from the colonel, whom he had not personally offended. And yet Sigoulès was resolved to compel him to fight, as he was of opinion that if La Cadière could be suppressed everything would come right again of itself. He hoped to find the viscount at the club, as he was not likely to renounce the gambling by which he gained a livelihood. Now the colonel had been proposed as a member of this club by his friend Paul de Lizy, who had stated that the election would only be a matter of twenty-four hours, for the committee were not over particular in such cases. The twenty-four hours had elapsed, and Sigoulès had half made up his mind to go in person to the club and ascertain the result, so impatient was he to meet La Cadière and compel him to fight.

He was also strongly tempted to venture upon a visit to the Countess de Marcenac ; but he was afraid he would not be admitted, as he had accompanied his friend to Montmartre. After consideration, he decided that it would be wiser to wait, and that the best way of regaining this charming woman's favour would be to rid her of the Viscount de la Cadière.

The colonel was finishing his third cigar when he suddenly noticed a man who was promenading to and fro in front of the café, furtively watching him, as if tempted to approach and speak. The fellow in question was tall, and unusually thin, with a sunburnt face, and a long sandy beard. His overcoat was very shabby, and his silk hat had evidently seen long service ; and his timid, embarrassed manner was that of a needy individual who has lost caste, and who blushes for his poverty. The more the colonel looked at him, the more convinced he became that he had seen the fellow somewhere before, but he racked his brain in vain to recall the place or circumstances. "I should say he had been in the army by his gait, and the way he carries his head," thought Sigoulès. "Perhaps it is some old trooper who has had bad luck, and who doesn't dare to ask me for alms. He is a fool, though, for I should give him enough to buy a dinner, of course."

However, the strange man seemed unable to summon the necessary courage to approach the colonel and speak to him ; still, he did not go away, but stopped in front of a newspaper kiosk, and pretended to be looking at the illustrated papers. "He is waiting for me to leave before he speaks to me," Sigoulès said to himself. "As soon as I have finished my glass of absinthe, I will give him a chance, for it is time for me to go to the club and find out if I am admitted or not."

As he leisurely sipped his absinthe, the colonel examined the stranger from head to foot, and finally, in the button-hole of his coat, which was turned up to the chin, probably to conceal some very soiled linen, he espied an almost imperceptible strip of ribbon which must have once been red, though rain and dust had so discoloured it that one could hardly believe it was the badge of the Legion of Honour. "Oh, ho !" muttered the colonel ; "that alters the case ! A member of the Legion has a right to consideration, especially when he is unlucky. This fellow seems to be pretty hard up. I must ask him to tell me his story, and I will see if he is worthy of interest."

Accordingly, as the stranger again passed in front of the café, he received such an encouraging look from Sigoulès that he paused, lifted his hat, and said, in a low tone: "Excuse me, sir; but have you not served in the African Chasseurs?"

"I still belong to that branch of the service," replied the colonel, kindly; "though it is a long time since I served my apprenticeship."

"I served mine about the same time, I think. Do you remember Roger de Bussière, your fellow countryman and comrade in the First Chasseurs?"

"Roger de Bussière!" exclaimed the colonel. "Why, old fellow, is this you?"

Upon hearing himself thus cordially addressed, the new-comer blushed, and seemed to be more embarrassed than ever. One would have fancied that he did not feel worthy of being treated so familiarly by his former comrade. Sigoulès understood him, and added, kindly: "Yes, I treat you exactly as I did in former times. I haven't forgotten the follies you were guilty of in the regiment; but I remember that if you hadn't come to my help one day the Arabs would have cut my throat, and I shouldn't be drinking absinthe at the Café du Helder this evening. So sit down, old fellow, and take something."

"No," stammered Bussière; "I am too shabbily dressed, and if an officer of your rank were seen drinking with me——"

"My rank! do you know my rank?"

"Yes; I have never ceased to think of you since I had to leave the army; and I know the date of all your promotions by heart. You have just been made a lieutenant-colonel."

"Yes; I flatter myself that I haven't stolen my epaulets. You would have had them also had it not been for those scrapes you got into."

"And for which I have certainly paid dearly."

"I should judge so. You must tell me all about it by-and-by; and, as you won't take a glass of absinthe, walk a little way with me. I am going towards the Madeline, and we can talk as we go along."

"What! walk along with you, dressed as I am! Aren't you ashamed of me?"

"My dear fellow, when a man has received the cross, and well deserved it, his companion can hardly be ashamed of him. Your name hasn't been struck off the rolls of the Legion of Honour, I suppose?"

"Thank heaven, no! but there are days when I dare not wear my ribbon—days when I am reduced to eating my crust in dens which honest men never enter."

"Is it, indeed, so, my poor Roger? I came just in time, it seems." The colonel rose, drained his glass, threw a coin on the table, and took the arm of his old comrade, who already began to look more cheerful. "Come," said Sigoulès, "now tell me frankly what you are doing in Paris."

"I am starving most of the time."

"At your age, and with your education?"

"Ah! I have tried my best to obtain work, I assure you; and I am not fastidious. I have even swept the streets; I have opened carriage doors outside theatres."

"What! is it possible you haven't been able to obtain employment?"

"Do you really think it such an easy matter? Wherever I apply I am asked where I come from, and I am sooner or later obliged to tell them that I had to leave the army, losing my rank as quartermaster, on account of my



debts, my unbecoming conduct, and unauthorised and oft-repeated absences. I have ruined my life by my love of pleasure, and now there is no hope for me. You speak of my cross. I certainly gained it by two deeds of bravery. Well, it has been a positive disadvantage, rather than an advantage to me. When I sank too low I would not wear it; and when I did wear it, I was asked what right I had to do so. I was obliged to show my brevet, and even then people distrusted me. Once, however, I was offered the position of footman to stand at the door of a large outfitting establishment. The situation was offered me because I was decorated. I was to receive one hundred and fifty francs per month and a gorgeous livery. It was a tempting offer, wasn't it, for a poor devil like me? But I refused it out of respect for the ribbon you see in my button-hole."

"You did right, Roger, you did right!" said Sigoulès, warmly.

"Oh! I don't claim any credit for it; for there have since been many moments when I regretted not having accepted it. What else could you expect, when one's stomach was empty for days?"

"Good heavens, Roger! I did not imagine you had ever been reduced to that. You had a father when I knew you; and, if I am not mistaken, he paid your debts two or three times."

"And it was because he paid them too often that he at last found himself reduced to penury. He then died of grief; he could not stand poverty. We were rich once; I was born in a château which had been in the Bussiére family for three hundred years, but which we were obliged to sell."

"I know the place well, as I come from Perigord like yourself. And, speaking of Perigord, did you know Marcenac?"

"The Count de Marcenac? I should think I did. What sums of money he won from me at cards before I enlisted. We had gay times in Perigord in those days. Marcenac wounded a number of fellows in duels. I met him in Paris afterwards, when I found myself in reduced circumstances. I knew he had retrieved his fortunes by a wealthy marriage, so I went to his house in the Faubourg Saint Honoré."

"Did he refuse to see you?"

"No, indeed; I had not then sunk as low as now. I had just come from Marseilles, where I had been engaged in some business affairs. I had realised some three thousand francs, and when I reached Paris I was tolerably well dressed. Marcenac not only received me cordially, but introduced me to his wife, who was then, and still is, a very charming woman."

"What, do you know the countess, too?"

"Yes, I know her, but I never venture to bow to her. Certain transactions that occurred between her husband and myself make me inclined to run away whenever I see her, for she must despise me."

"Pray explain. You can hardly imagine how much this interests me. I suppose you know that Marcenac is dead?"

"Yes; he was killed in a duel. I certainly ought to know it, as I was one of his seconds—against my will, I assure you, for he was a most disreputable fellow. I was not exactly intimate with him, but as long as he lived I never knew abject poverty."

"He assisted you, then?"

"No; he paid me for certain work which he intrusted to me. He was one of the most inveterate spendthrifts that ever lived. He squandered his wife's dowry so recklessly that, six months after his marriage, he was

as much embarrassed as before. He borrowed right and left at no matter what interest. Money he must have at any cost; and the funds he thus obtained disappeared in the most extraordinary way. It is true, however, that he had resumed his old habits, drank, gambled, and indulged in every expensive vice in the most reckless manner, although he had just married a lovely young wife. Well, the truth is, he employed me as a sort of intermediary between himself and his innumerable creditors. He kept me running about to negotiate new loans, or renew old ones; and when I succeeded, he allowed me a commission—a very small one, for he was a miser at heart, in spite of all his extravagance."

"Then you acted very dishonourably towards Madame de Marcenac."

"I don't deny it. My only excuse is that I had no choice, for I was quite without resources."

"Tell me about the duel," said the colonel, irritated by the confession he had just elicited.

"I have no reason to reproach myself respecting it," replied Roger de Bussière, with more assurance. "I did all I could to prevent it; but in vain. Marcenac quarreled at the card-table with a Russian, and struck him, in the presence of more than twenty persons. This Russian was no better than the count, but he proved to be a more expert swordsman. In fact, I am satisfied that Marcenac was the victim of a shameful conspiracy."

"A conspiracy!" repeated Sigoulès, amazed at this assertion.

"Yes; a conspiracy. Among the disreputable characters with whom he associated there was a man who had sworn to effect his ruin and death."

"What was this man's name?" asked Sigoulès.

"Gonfaron de la Cadière. He calls himself a viscount."

On receiving this reply, for which he was not altogether unprepared, the colonel paused abruptly, laid his hand upon his companion's shoulder, and, looking at him searchingly, asked: "Was it this scoundrel who sent you to hang about the Café du Helder and speak to me?"

Such an expression of mingled bewilderment and consternation appeared upon the ex-quartermaster's face that Sigoulès instantly realised that his charge was unfounded. "Why do you ask me such a question as that, colonel?" faltered Roger. "That rascally Cadière has always hated me, and I have never spoken to him since the duel. Whenever I see him coming towards me in the street I always cross over to the opposite side."

"I believe you, and I am sorry that I thought you were in his hire," replied the colonel. "I, too, hate him, and with good cause."

"You know him, then? Why, to be sure, you did meet him years ago. You don't recollect the circumstance? I can remind you of it, if you have forgotten it. It was at Marseilles, about twenty years ago. Our furloughs had expired, and we were about to embark for Algiers. One evening we entered a gaming-house where this Gonfaron was keeping the bank. He did not then assume the title which he has since picked up, Heaven only knows where. I was sure I saw him cheat in dealing the cards, and I flung mine in his face. A hostile meeting was arranged for the next day, and you and another officer who had witnessed the quarrel were to act as my seconds. We waited at the appointed spot all the morning, but La Cadière did not make his appearance; and, instead of the duel, we had a breakfast, at which I got gloriously intoxicated."

"Yes; I remember the affair now as well as if it had happened only

yesterday. This is why it seemed to me that I had seen him somewhere before, when I met him at the club the other day. But go on with your story, old fellow. You were saying that you felt certain that La Cadière drew Marcenac into a sort of a trap."

"Not that exactly; the duel was conducted with a careful observance of all the usual rules; but the Russian was an ex-fencing master—and an exceedingly expert one—who pretended to be a nobleman. La Cadière knew he would kill Marcenac, so he adroitly managed to bring about a quarrel between them."

"Why did La Cadière have such a grudge against Marcenac?"

"They had been acquainted a long time, and had led much the same kind of life. Marcenac, who had no friends but gamblers, had been foolish enough to admit La Cadière to his house, introduce him to his wife, and compel her to receive him on a footing of comparative intimacy. I say *compel* her, because from the very first she had a perfect horror of the man, for reasons I could never satisfactorily explain. Possibly she knew something about his antecedents. At all events she could not endure him; and yet the scoundrel at once began to pay court to her in the most ardent manner, under the very nose of her husband, who could not or would not see."

"But they must have quarrelled afterwards, as La Cadière acted as his opponent's second."

"Yes; but it wasn't because Marcenac had at last opened his eyes. They quarrelled about some note which was endorsed by both of them; one fine morning Marcenac found himself obliged to pay a round sum for La Cadière, who pretended he had no money, and this brought their friendly relations to an end. The countess had closed her doors against the viscount some time before, and he revenged himself by circulating the most outrageous reports about her character. Very possibly these came to the husband's ears, and irritated him still more."

"But what could the scoundrel have said against Madame de Marcenac?"

"He never said anything to me, as we were not on speaking terms. He recollected the affair at Marseilles, and pretended not to know me; but I heard that he boasted of possessing a secret which affected the honour of the countess. He even asserted that if she were a widow, he could compel her to marry him, adding that she would be glad to do so, if only to prevent him from disclosing what he knew about her past."

"And you think that was why he induced the fencing-master to pick a quarrel with the count?"

"I am sure of it."

"His expectations do not seem likely to be realised, for I know that the countess has a perfect horror of him."

"I know nothing about what has occurred since the duel, as the count's death reduced me to the most abject poverty; for I had no resources except the small sums that Marcenac paid me from time to time. When these payments ceased I disappeared like a ship-wrecked sailor who goes down in mid-ocean. Besides, the authorities talked of arresting Marcenac's adversary and the seconds. The Russian fled to his native land, and La Cadière also disappeared. I heard nothing more about them for a long time, and now all I know is that La Cadière has reappeared, more brilliant than ever, and that no one thinks of disturbing him. He is seen everywhere. But I need not tell you this, as you yourself have met him at one of the fashionable clubs. Did he recognise you?"

"I think not; I certainly did not know *him*. I did not take a very prominent part in your quarrel, you recollect; besides, I have changed a good deal since then. But I shall remind him of the affair when the proper time comes. It is one trump more in my hand. By the way," added the colonel, carelessly: "You must have met Paul de Lizy."

"No, never."

"True; I forgot that Lizy only served with me during the war of '70, and you were not in the army then. However, he resigned his position of lieutenant as soon as peace was made; and you may have met him afterwards at the house of Madame de Marcenac. By the way, do you know one of the latter's friends, a Madame Larmor?"

"The name seems familiar to me. Doesn't she reside in the country, at a short distance from Paris?"

"Yes; in the vicinity of Melun."

"It must be the same person. I never saw her, but I know that Marcenac detested her. He was always running her down, and he forbade his wife to visit her. Still, I think that she did visit her secretly."

"Do you know why she was so anxious to keep up the acquaintance?"

"No; but I think they had been both educated at the same boarding-school."

"And Madame Larmor's husband?"

"If I am not very much mistaken he was a civil engineer, and he was abroad most of the time. Marcenac was a thorough aristocrat, in spite of his low associates, and he would have nothing whatever to do with some very nice people, simply because he considered them beneath him, as they were not of noble birth."

"And yet he was on intimate terms with La Cadière, an adventurer. But tell me, among the usurers whom Marcenac sent you to, wasn't there one who resided at Fontainebleau?"

"Yes; I knew him very well. His name was Basfroi, and he did a great deal of business with Marcenac. It was he who arranged the count's marriage, to recover his money. Basfroi had been the partner of the countess's father in former years. Marcenac agreed to make what he considered a *mésalliance* so as to pay his debts; but his wife was not ashamed of her humble origin, for she gave a cordial welcome to all her father's friends, even to Basfroi, despite of the disreputable calling in which he was engaged. She often went to Fontainebleau to see him, and she also visited a man named Chardin, an ex-linen-merchant, who resided in the Rue des Lions Saint Paul, in the Marais, and who was very intimate with Basfroi. This fellow, Chardin, has known all these people much longer than I have, and if you desire any further information about them, you can probably obtain it by applying to him."

"That is a fact worth knowing. You say he lives in the Rue des Lions Saint Paul; what number?"

"I can't tell you the number, but I know the house. Madame de Marcenac sent me there once, soon after I made her first acquaintance. I can take you there at any time, if you care to have a talk with the old fellow. He is a highly respectable man."

"Did he know La Cadière?"

"Most likely he did, for La Cadière was one of Basfroi's best customers. I met him more than once at the usurer's house in Fontainebleau. These meetings always annoyed La Cadière, for he tried to conceal the fact that he was obliged to borrow money, though every one knew it. La Cadière is a

cunning scoundrel. He must be, to cut such a dash in Paris after all his rascality in Marseilles, his native place."

"No doubt, but do you think he is capable of murdering any one?"

"He is certainly a coward, but he would not shrink from such a crime, except, perhaps, from a fear of the assizes."

"Then you think he would feel no scruples about murdering Basfroi?" asked the colonel.

"La Cadière would not scruple to murder him if he felt sure of being able to do it with impunity," replied Roger de Bussière; "but it would be very much like killing the hen that lays the golden eggs, for the viscount is often obliged to have recourse to Basfroi's safe."

"But suppose it happened to be well filled, and he could reasonably hope to secure its contents."

"Oh, in that case La Cadière would run the risk; but he would find it a difficult task, for Basfroi guards his money with great care. He lives alone, for economy's sake, but he never admits strangers, and always barricades the door at night."

"It is very evident that you don't read the papers," remarked Sigoulès. "If you had done so, you would know that Basfroi was murdered the other night in his house, and only a few steps from his safe, which the murderer conscientiously rifled. There was nothing left, either in the way of money, bonds, or notes. The murderer escaped with his plunder, and the police are still looking for him. There is every reason to suppose that he is in Paris."

"But Paris is a large place. Have the police no other clue?"

"They think that Basfroi must have been acquainted with the man who murdered him, from the fact that he admitted him into the house that night, and opened his safe of his own accord."

"Then it is evident that the murderer must have been one of Basfroi's debtors, with whom he had been long acquainted. Basfroi would not have transacted business with a stranger after sunset. Marcenac once sent me to Fontainebleau to get a note renewed. I missed the train, and did not reach Basfroi's house until nine o'clock in the evening. I rang and rapped, and shouted to him that I had come on behalf of Marcenac; but he wouldn't open the door to me. He came down, however, and shouted: 'Go to the devil! I don't do business at night!'"

"But he would have opened the door for Marcenac, if the count had gone to him in person?"

"Yes, undoubtedly; in fact, I know that he often did so; for, after his marriage, Marcenac took great care to conceal his visits to the usurer. When he was obliged to see Basfroi he wrote to him, making an appointment late in the evening, so that he might not meet any one in the streets of Fontainebleau, where people retire early."

"Do you think that if La Cadière had presented himself at Basfroi's house at a late hour, Basfroi would have admitted him?"

"I think so; especially if La Cadière had warned him of his intended visit. Basfroi had no confidence in the viscount's integrity, but he had made large profits in his transactions with him, and to preserve his patronage he would certainly have departed from the rules he observed with other clients. Besides, he did not believe that La Cadière was the man to imperil his life by committing a crime. However, if you really think it was the viscount who killed Basfroi, and if you have any proofs to support your assertion, it is easy for you to denounce him."

"My dear fellow, when a man is an officer in the French army, he doesn't act the part of an informer, especially when he did not witness the crime, and is not absolutely certain of the truth of the charge. However, I have some friends who have important reasons for wishing the culprit to be discovered; and if this culprit proved to be Monsieur de la Cadière, I could at the same time rid them of a scoundrel who is trying to injure and annoy them."

"If I can help you in discovering the truth I will gladly do so; but I am only a poor devil. I am acquainted with no one, and visit nowhere. Still, tell me how I can serve you. I will accept no reward. I have already been paid in advance by the kindness with which you have treated me."

"I certainly did it without expecting to derive any advantage from it, for I did not imagine that you knew La Cadière, Marcenac, or Basfroi. I did it because I never desert an old comrade, especially when he has not done anything that reflects upon his honour. I am firmly resolved to draw you out of the mire in which you have been struggling so long, and place you in a position to earn your living honourably. If you can be of use to my friends so much the better. If you can't, that makes no difference; I intend to help you unconditionally. Nor will you owe me any gratitude, for, if the cases were reversed, you would, I am sure, extend a helping hand to me."

"Ah! you haven't changed in the least," exclaimed the former quartermaster. "You are the same Sigoulès I knew in years gone by, the same kind-hearted, generous man."

"No compliments, old fellow. What we say must be to the point; and let us begin at the beginning. Where do you lodge?"

"Wherever I can. I am obliged, however, to admit that I have no home at present."

"Never mind; you shall have one before night; and as you can't shine in society in the clothes you now wear, you must spend to-morrow with my tailor, who will rig you out from top to toe. I want your ribbon to adorn the button of a new frock coat, and it would be as well for you to purchase a fresh ribbon, for the one you are now wearing is much faded. In a few days I shall endeavour to secure you suitable employment. You can't re-enter the army; but you would make a capital manager for a large estate, and I can, perhaps, obtain some such post for you."

"It would be a heaven upon earth, for I detest Paris. I have suffered too much to have any desire to remain there."

"But I shan't be able to get you away for some little time, of course; and while waiting for a suitable opportunity to present itself, you must have something to live upon," said the colonel, drawing out his pocket-book.

"No, no!" said Roger, blushing, "I won't accept alms, nor will I allow you to inconvenience yourself on my account."

"It won't inconvenience me in the least. I only have my pay to depend upon; but I recently won five hundred louis at baccarat, so I can certainly spare you a thousand-franc note. No ceremony; here it is. You can repay me from your salary when you have one."

"I should prefer not to take any money," protested Roger, as his companion forced a bank note into his hand.

"A man can't live without money, and I want you to live," replied the colonel, gaily. "Besides, I count upon your assisting some of my friends, and a man is not good for much when he isn't sure of his grub."

"Do you really think that I can be of use to your friends?"

"Well, I want to deliver them from the persecutions of this fellow La Cadière, and as you are acquainted with his antecedents, you may be able to render me valuable assistance when the campaign I am opening against him is further advanced. He has suddenly disappeared from the Continental Hôtel where I myself am stopping; but if I can succeed in laying my hand upon him again he will not escape me, I promise you."

"You won't succeed in making him fight with you."

"I am afraid not; but I shall try, and if necessary, I shall even strike him in the face in some public place."

"I flung a pack of cards in his face, and you know how that affair ended."

"Yes; he ran away; but I can, at least, compel him to leave Paris, and that is what I want to effect. If he has the assurance to remain, you can relate the principal events of his life to certain officials, who will keep him in prison until they send him before the assizes. Now, you also mentioned a Monsieur Chardine, who was a friend of Basfroi."

"Oh, yes! he can tell you much more about the usurer's affairs and clients than I can. The main thing is to ascertain if he is willing to do so."

"We can try him. Didn't you tell me that you would take me to his house?"

"Willingly; but I fear you won't find me a very desirable chaperon, I never saw him but once, when he didn't treat me very cordially; and since then I am sure that Madame de Mercenac has told him no good of me, for she has closed her doors against me. Chardine may do the same."

"I will devise some means of opening them, then. All you need do is to show me the house, and indeed the sooner the better. I am now going over the way to the club, where Monsieur de la Cadière gambles every evening. I happened to win ten thousand francs from him the other night, but he won one hundred thousand from my friend, Paul de Lizy, who took me there. I have requested Paul to propose me as a member, and I am going to ascertain if I have been admitted. It won't take long, for I have no expectation of meeting the viscount, who only goes there at night time, so you can wait for me here on the boulevard."

"I will wait as long as you please."

"Very well; and when I have finished at the club we will go to Monsieur Chardin's. I have no time to spare: I want to strike the iron while it is hot."

### XIII.

THE colonel and his old comrade had walked rapidly, and as the club which La Cadière patronised was not far from the Café du Helder it was barely half-past five when Sigoulès entered the ante-chamber where he had been so obsequiously received on the occasion of his first visit with Paul de Lizy. In respectable clubs everything is in order at half-past five, and the throng of members is then often greater than at any other time. However, at this establishment, created merely for gambling, the members only assembled at hours when honest people are in bed. In the day-time the club was kept open merely for form's sake, and the various servants then took their ease. In the cloak-room the colonel found two footmen playing *écarté* upon a bench; and a third, who was half asleep in an arm-

chair, did not condescend to rise and take the visitor's overcoat, or ask his purpose. However, Sigoulès did not think it necessary to disturb these fellows, as they would not be able to tell him what he wished to know, so he went straight on, without being questioned by any one. The gas was not yet lighted, though it was nearly nightfall. The hall was deserted, and the diner's register, which was lying on the desk, had not been opened. "Can the establishment have failed?" thought the colonel. This was not improbable, for gambling-dens are proverbially short-lived. The colonel pushed on; he was looking for the steward or for some *habitué* who could tell him where he would be likely to find this important personage. The apartment he next entered was the one into which Paul had first conducted him, and where the interesting conversation respecting the Viscount de la Cadière had taken place. But the aspect of the room was now very different to what it had been in the brilliant glare in which Sigoulès had before beheld it. The silk curtains seemed faded, the carpet soiled, and he detected an indescribable smell but partially overpowered by the scent of the innumerable cigars smoked in this room the night before. There were no members chattering around the fireplace, in which the fire was not even lighted; no players sat at the tables—and the colonel, in disgust, was about to beat a retreat, when a door at the other end of the room opened to admit a gentleman, who, with a cigar in his mouth and his hat on the back of his head, advanced flourishing his cane with the arrogance and indifference of a man who has been long familiar with Parisian life. Sigoulès did not at first recognize him in the dim light; but the newcomer went towards him with his arms outstretched, as if to embrace him. "How do you do, my dear colonel?" exclaimed this singular personage. "I am delighted to see you again so soon. Do you intend to dine here? If so, I will at once bespeak a place for the pleasure of sitting beside you."

"Excuse me, sir," rejoined Sigoulès, "but will you kindly tell me to whom I have the honour of speaking?"

"What, don't you know me? I'm Alfred Dauzance. I recognised you at once. You are Paul de Lizy's friend, and the dear baron's friends are mine."

"I now recollect meeting you the other evening, sir," replied the colonel, rather coldly, for he did not feel inclined to encourage such familiarity.

"I hope we shall see each other every day, now that you are one of us," remarked Dauzance, not in the least abashed by this frigid reception.

"Ah, indeed! I have been elected, then?"

"Unanimously. You certainly did not doubt the success of your application. In the first place, you were nominated by one of the most highly-honoured members of the club; besides, I should like to see any one of the blockheads who compose the committee venture to blackball an officer of your rank. There is a great scarcity of colonels amongst us. I believe you are the first whose name ever figured upon our list of life members. If you are fond of card-playing, you will always find a lively game going on here."

"Oh, I don't care much about cards; I only play occasionally."

"And generally with very enviable success, I should judge. You must have won five hundred louis the other night; so much taken from the common enemy. La Cadière quite used up poor Lizy. It is fortunate that you managed to secure a few thousand francs from the viscount's enormous winnings."



"Am I to suppose that he always wins?"

"Generally; but since the evening he treated Lizy so badly, my lord de la Cadière has found his match. Last night we had a visit from a Spaniard, who is evidently in the habit of carrying everything before him; he subjected the viscount to one of those crushing defeats which are memorable in a man's life. You ought to have been here last night to bet on this foreigner's hand."

"Then M. de la Cadière lost heavily last evening?" inquired Sigoulès, beginning to grow interested.

"Yes, indeed. The contest ended at about six o'clock this morning, with a bet of twenty thousand francs, played upon parole, after La Cadière had entirely emptied his pockets, which were well filled at first, I assure you. He produced roll after roll of bank-notes. Ah! it was a grand sight, that game!"

"Is he so very rich then?"

"He! why, he never had an income of a thousand francs in his life. He has nothing but what he wins at cards. You, of course, recollect that he won one hundred thousand francs from the baron the other night; but last evening he lost more than three times that amount. If I were inclined to be malicious, I should say he had robbed a stage-coach. He must be dead broke now, and if he doesn't waylay some other diligence, I don't see how he will get out of the scrape. Basfroi, who was his only resource, is dead, and the viscount must sincerely mourn his loss. I am inclined to think that he will suddenly disappear, as he has done several times before. On such occasions the eclipse is total, and lasts a longer or shorter period, as the case may be; but he always turns up again in the best of spirits, pays off his creditors, and begins the same life as before."

"But will it be the same this time?"

"Oh! he will, perhaps, manage to escape from his difficulties once more; but he must be in great distress, for he is trying to obtain some coin from Auguste, and, to apply to him, he must be at his wits' end. Auguste is a croupier who has made a handsome fortune by lending money to fellows who are hard up, but he knows his business, and only lends to wealthy men. He got caught once by a fellow called the Count de Charny, who was killed here in a duel,\* and since then he has been very cautious. I just saw him talking with the viscount, in the billiard-room, and the affair did not seem to be progressing very well, for La Cadière looked terribly worried."

"Is La Cadière here now?" cried the colonel.

"Certainly," replied Dauzance; "he is negotiating with Auguste, as I said before. Do you wish to see him?"

This question somewhat embarrassed Sigoulès. He had only joined the club for the sake of meeting the pretended viscount; but he did not care to take a man whom he scarcely knew into his confidence. "No; I am not particular about it," he replied, carelessly, shrugging his shoulders.

"And you are right. It is hardly safe to approach him when he is out of luck. Adversity doesn't seem to have a softening effect upon his character, and I don't suppose you care to pick a quarrel with him." The colonel could not help colouring. It almost seemed to him that Dauzance could read his intentions. "If you did, I fancy you would be wasting your time," continued Dauzance. "I don't think he is much of a fighter."

---

\* See M. du Boisgobey's Novel, "*In the Serpents' Coils*."

But you can have no reason to be offended with him. You won some money from him, and your friend lost a great deal, but that is no cause for a duel."

"Certainly not; and I feel no interest whatever in Monsieur de la Cadière. My surprise on hearing that he was at the club arose from what you just told me. I fancied he had already left Paris."

"And he will soon do so if he does not succeed in moving the heart of our croupier. However, he possesses great persuasive powers, as well as extraordinary assurance. He is very clever at inventing stories to loosen his acquaintance's purse-strings. When I think how many years he succeeded in maintaining his credit with Basfroi, I can but admire his tact, for Basfroi only opened his safe for persons who could give undoubted security. It is true, however, that their business acquaintance was of long standing. It was Count de Marcenac who introduced him to Basfroi, I believe; and Marcenac was one of the old usurer's best customers."

"Marcenac?" replied Sigoulès. "I knew him well."

"Then you must have met La Cadière. They quarrelled a short time before the count's death, but before that they were inseparable."

"I did not meet Monsieur de Marcenac when he lived in Paris; but we were from the same province, and it was there that I first saw him, some twenty-five years ago."

"But you must know the countess. Lizy is a constant visitor at her house, and report says that he intends to marry her. How did the news of the murder affect her?"

"I don't know," stammered the colonel, surprised to hear Dauzance speak of his friend's intended marriage so lightly.

"You are, perhaps, not aware that this Basfroi was once the partner of Madame de Marcenac's father. But the fact is, she is the daughter of a woollen merchant, now deceased. The style and title of the firm was Plantier, Basfroi & Co. The countess often went to see the old miser, and his death must have grieved her; to say nothing of the fact that the affair is making quite a stir; and that she may be summoned as a witness in the trial which is sure to follow. Nothing else has been talked of at the club for the last three days. All the members who were Basfroi's debtors are on the *qui vive*. They all expect to be called before the magistrate who is investigating the crime, and they are not at all pleased with the prospect. There is only one of them who really succeeds in appearing indifferent, and he is the very one who is most likely to fare hard, on account of his reputation and antecedents."

"Do you mean Monsieur de la Cadière?"

"The same. I try to torment him by asking him every evening if his examination passed off well, and if the magistrate was good-natured. Last night, while he was playing against the Spaniard who beat him in every deal, I amused myself by suddenly shouting out behind him: 'Prisoners for Mazas, all aboard!' But he did not so much as wink; while two or three other customers of Basfroi, who were among the players, became so incensed at what they called my unseemly jesting that I could not help laughing."

"What a set!" thought Sigoulès; "and to think that I belong to it! thanks to Lizy."

"It would seem that La Cadière has nothing to fear," continued Dauzance, "for he told some one, who repeated his remark to me, that he had been

visiting a lady on the night of Basfroi's murder, and that if the authorities evinced a disposition to trouble him he could easily prove an *alibi*."

"Yes, by dishonouring a lady," said Sigoulès, quickly.

"Oh! that consideration would not deter him; but I don't fancy that his keen sense of honour and delicacy of feeling will be tested, for no one is likely to denounce him. Besides, as all the usurer's books and papers have disappeared, the magistrates who are investigating the affair won't think of suspecting him. The mere gossip of club men amounts to nothing. Ah! if Basfroi's books, or even some memoranda giving a list of his creditors were found, it would be very different. But it isn't likely that they ever will be found, and La Cadière can sleep in peace. He will probably disappear for a time, as I said just now. I shouldn't be surprised if he tried to retrieve his fortunes at Monaco, or some similar place, and by the time he returns to Paris, Basfroi's murder will be forgotten. Now, my dear colonel, it seems to me that we have wasted enough time talking about this Provençal nobleman. You know now that you are one of us. I had the pleasure of announcing the fact to you. Can I serve you in any way?"

"No, sir; I thank you. Still, if you will have the kindness to tell me where I can find the steward, I shall be obliged to you, as I should like to pay my fee."

"The steward isn't here. But Auguste will do just as well. He is the mainstay of the establishment. Everything connected with the treasury, particularly, is in his charge. He is, as you know, now in conference with La Cadière in the billiard-hall. I would offer to take you there, but I see that it is six o'clock, and I have an appointment at Tortoni's at a quarter-past. I shall barely have time to get there. So, au revoir, my dear colonel," concluded Dauzance, pressing Sigoulès' hand.

Although the colonel was very glad to be relieved of this officious personage, he felt not a little perplexed. He was in pursuit of La Cadière, and had only one or two rooms to cross to join him, and yet he hesitated. His object was to free the countess and her friend Madame Larmor from this dangerous scoundrel by compelling him to leave the country, and he hoped to accomplish this by challenging him to fight. Dauzance, however, seemed to think that La Cadière would disappear for want of money. In that case, would it not be preferable to allow him to depart without making the situation more complicated by a quarrel which would, perhaps, amount to nothing, but which would certainly be noised abroad? Besides, it mattered very little to Sigoulès whether Basfroi's murderer was brought to justice or not, providing he ceased to trouble the two women he was persecuting. However, in any case it was very necessary to ascertain whether he would not attempt to ruin them before his departure by an anonymous denunciation. He was quite capable of such an act, and it was necessary to avert it, if possible. The only means of doing so was to hasten his departure, and to threaten him with a denunciation at the first news of danger. The colonel now knew the scoundrel's past life, and he could vouch for the fact that the pretended viscount was the traveller who had purchased Paul de Lizy's ticket, and paid for it with a fifty-franc bank note, stained with blood. Moreover, he could suggest to the magistrate the idea of searching the houses of Basfroi's friends for any papers that the deceased might have entrusted to their keeping.

While the colonel was thus weighing the pros and cons of the case, the members of the club began to drop in. The footmen had woken up and lighted the gas, and several gentlemen had already passed through the

room in which Sigoulès was sitting. Those who intended to partake of the seven o'clock dinner were also arriving, and it was absolutely necessary for the colonel to come to a decision under penalty of entirely missing his opportunity. Just then, he again saw the door at the end of the room open, and this time La Cadière appeared, followed by a man dressed in black, who could be none other than Auguste, the croupier. They appeared to be on very good terms, but they separated as soon as they espied the colonel. Auguste went on into the next room, while M. de la Cadière came straight toward Madame de Marcenac's champion. The meeting had become inevitable, and Sigoulès boldly confronted the enemy. He was not a man to shrink from anything he considered right, and, besides, he preferred to have the explanation over as soon as possible.

"How do you do, colonel?" said the viscount, carelessly. "Are you still angry with me?"

Sigoulès found it difficult to restrain his wrath, but his indignation did not prevent him from noticing that M. de la Cadière's manner was extremely easy. Auguste had evidently been accommodating, and the viscount no doubt had the money he had borrowed in his pocket. "I am only angry with persons who offend me, and whom I respect," replied the colonel, drily. "I have nothing whatever to do with you personally, but there is some one who is looking for you."

"Ah, yes!" sneered La Cadière, "the husband, I suppose. Well, if he looks for me long enough he will perhaps find me. I am not hiding from him."

"Then why did you leave the hotel so hastily, and without giving your address?"

"How do you know I have left the Continental? I hardly thought you would do me the honour to make any inquiries about me."

"I am not the only person who has done so. The man you wronged has no idea of letting you off so easily. He has sworn that you shall pay him dearly for your insulting remarks about his wife."

"How do you know that this man is in pursuit of me?"

"When you ran away he came to me and tried to compel me to fight in your place. I had a good deal of trouble in making him listen to reason; but he finally left me, declaring that he would follow you up until he found you; and I will not conceal from you the fact that he is firmly resolved to kill you."

"In a duel, I suppose?" said M. de la Cadière, ironically.

"Monsieur Larmor is an honourable man, and honourable men don't commit murder," replied Sigoulès, looking the viscount full in the face.

"Is it for me, colonel, that this remark is intended; and am I to take it as a covert allusion to events with which you are much more familiar than myself?"

"You are at liberty to think whatever you please."

"You cannot be speaking seriously. I was the first to declare to your friend, the Baron de Lizy, that I was the person who had travelled with him from Melun to Paris. I told him this, however, in confidence, although I took no offence when he revealed the secret to you, for I hoped you would be prudent; but my object in asking him to keep the matter a secret was only to avoid compromising a lady."

"Yes, a lady whose lover you boasted of being in her husband's presence."

"I had not the slightest idea that the husband was listening. I regret

any imprudence, and would even gladly do anything in my power to atone for it; but a duel would only give greater publicity to this unfortunate affair. I shall, therefore, only consent to it as a last resort; and I confess, without the slightest reluctance, that I did change my quarters in order to avoid Monsieur Larmor. I am not at all afraid of being accused of the murder of Basfroi, who often lent me money at thirty per cent., and who would have accommodated me many more times had he lived, for I often need coin on account of my heavy losses at the card-table——”

“As at the present moment, for instance. Is it true, yes or no, that you lost three hundred thousand francs last night, and still owe twenty-five thousand more?”

“You have been misinformed, colonel, on the last point. I have just settled my account with the treasurer of the club, and I shall try to take my revenge this evening.”

“Then you have succeeded in obtaining some funds from Auguste, the valet who lends money to impecunious gamblers?”

The viscount turned pale with anger, but replied, with undiminished arrogance: “It seems to me, colonel, that you are meddling rather too much with my affairs. Pray tell me your object in asking these questions?”

“I will,” Sigoulès coldly replied. “There are two ladies in whom I take an interest. You have betrayed one of them and slandered the other. Your inexcusable remarks have placed Madame Larmor in a terrible position. Her husband is determined to kill her; and even if she succeeded in escaping his vengeance, what would become of her? The mischief is already done, but there is still time for me to prevent you from doing Madame de Marcenac an irreparable injury.”

“Do her an injury! Really, I never thought of such a thing. I thought I was doing her a service by telling Monsieur de Lizy of the existence of a will which makes her Basfroi's sole heiress. I thought I was putting her on her guard against the troublesome questions some magistrate might ask her, if she were examined, as I fear she will be.”

“That's your pretext; but your real aim is entirely different. You were afraid that Monsieur de Lizy would denounce you to the authorities, so you let him understand that, on your side, you would denounce Madame de Marcenac, if he revealed what he knew.”

“Denounce her! Why, I never had any grievance whatever against this lady. I only know her by sight.”

“You have a very poor memory. You were very intimate with the Count de Marcenac some years ago. He introduced you to his wife, who shortly afterwards closed her doors against you; and you have never forgiven her for the affront you so richly deserved. To convince you that my information is correct, need I remind you of the rôle you played in the quarrel which resulted in the Count de Marcenac's death?”

“The duel was fairly conducted!” exclaimed the viscount.

“As fairly conducted, perhaps, as anything of the kind can be between a man who fences tolerably well and a professional. The adversary you brought against Marcenac was not arrested, nor were you, for the matter of that. You took good care not to do anything that would criminate you, but you wanted to put the count out of the way because you hoped to marry his widow. You did not succeed, and so you feel an intense hatred for the countess.”

“This is a romance which does honour to your imagination, colonel!”

“It is no romance, but a true story; and I don't intend that there shall

be a second volume of it. I wish you to leave France, and before you go to give me a promise in writing not to set foot in this country again for ten years. This is the limit of time fixed by law for action in criminal cases."

"So you dare to accuse me of having murdered Basfroi?"

"I do; and I have it in my power, not only to deliver you up to the authorities, but to furnish them with unquestionable proofs of your guilt. However, it suits me to offer you a means of saving yourself. Disappear, and I will promise to be silent."

These words made an evident impression upon the viscount. A forced smile curved his lips; but anxiety could be detected in his eyes. "Really," he said, after a short pause, "I think I must be dreaming when I hear you address such language to me. I have nothing to say to you in reply, except that I am at your service in case your object is to pick a quarrel with me."

"You are at my service! You must allow me to doubt it. Courage must have come to you very late in life, for you used to have the bad habit of disappointing your opponents, and leaving them to wait in vain for your return. Do you recollect a young officer who threw his cards in your face in a café in the Rue de Paradis, at Marseilles? Well, I was his second, and we waited for you during two hours at the place you had appointed for our meeting. Are you surprised if I don't care to expose myself to a similar disappointment again? You would certainly run away, so I insist upon the ultimatum I just mentioned to you."

"And what if I refused to submit to it?" sneered La Cadière.

"I should then go straight to the commissary of police who arrested Monsieur de Lizy on his return from Lyons, and tell him that the traveller without a ticket was a Monsieur Gonfaron, alias de la Cadière, who spends every night at a club between the Opera House and the Madeleine, and I should add that this gentleman has just lost three hundred thousand francs, which originally came from Basfroi's safe. We should then see what he thought of the announcement."

"I can prove that the money belonged to me, and that I was at Bois le Roi at the time when Basfroi was murdered at Fontainebleau."

"You reached Bois le Roi, worn out with your tramp, nearly three hours after the crime was committed. As for the scandal which your assertion would create, and the investigation which would follow, Madame Larmor is too deeply compromised already for her reputation to suffer more; so I can afford to laugh at what you say. But this is not all; I shall also inform the magistrate that you were one of Basfroi's debtors; that you were deeply interested in the destruction of a promissory note which was about to fall due, and that you were the only person interested in preserving the will bequeathing the murdered man's property to Madame de Marcenac, upon whom you wished to direct suspicion."

"I defy you to find upon Basfroi's books the slightest trace of any debt that I have not discharged."

"Upon the books! no; you have destroyed them. But this proof may be found elsewhere. Basfroi was a cautious and methodical man; besides, he perhaps had a presentiment of what would happen to him, and he undoubtedly left a copy of his memorandum book."

"In that case, the investigating magistrate would have found it."

"No, for Basfroi had put it in a safe place." Although Sigoulès made this assertion with great apparent assurance, he was not without his misgivings, for the existence of such a copy was extremely doubtful. Roger

de Bussière had suggested the idea, and Sigoulès had seized upon it as a weapon against La Cadière. The success of his stratagem surpassed his most sanguine hopes.

The viscount's assurance suddenly deserted him. The shot had plainly told, although he tried his best to put on a bold face. "If Basfroi really followed such a system of double entry," he remarked, with a pretended indifference which was contradicted by his pallor, "you would greatly oblige me by telling me where he kept the copy, for it would contain proof that I owed him nothing when he died."

"I don't care to oblige you," replied the colonel, curtly, for he mistrusted his adversary's intentions; and, besides, he would have found it rather difficult to give the desired information. It is true that Bussière had spoken of Chardin as the probable custodian of some of Basfroi's papers; but this was only a conjecture, and besides, Sigoulès took good care not to mention Chardin's name lest he might thus enable La Cadière to secure and destroy the papers furnishing overwhelming evidence against him. "However, I shall give all necessary information to the commissary of police, in case you compel me to do so by refusing to submit to my terms," continued the colonel.

"Submit to your terms!" repeated La Cadière, ironically. "One would imagine you were talking to some vanquished Arab chief."

"The comparison is not just. Arab chiefs fight valiantly before surrendering."

"If you intend that as a taunt, I will only say that twenty years ago I certainly refused to fight with a low fellow who insulted me in a gambling-den, but I did right to refuse, and I should do the same thing again, under the same circumstances. Are you aware of what has befallen that fellow since that foolish quarrel at Marseilles? He has been dismissed from the army, and has been engaged in all sorts of disreputable transactions. He acted for some time as the toady and factotum of the Count de Marcenac. Can he be the person who has told you these absurd stories about me? He is quite capable of it. I know that he is still dragging out a miserable existence in Paris."

Sigoulès realised that he had done wrong to make any allusion to the old affair in which Roger de Bussière had figured. La Cadière was evidently trying to engage his opponent in unimportant discussions, and thus divert attention and escape the ultimatum. Perhaps he was also anxious to ascertain where Roger was, to secure his help, or at least to buy from him some information about the man to whom Basfroi had entrusted his memoranda. The colonel was not altogether sure of the fidelity of his new ally, and did not care to expose him to temptations which might prove too powerful, for La Cadière undoubtedly had a large sum of money in his pocket. "It matters little about the past," replied Sigoulès. "I would gladly consent to fight with you, if we could do so here and now, for I am sure I should kill you. But that is impossible, and I know that if I once let you out of my sight, the duel could never take place; so I hold to my first proposition. Will you, or will you not leave the country, and sign a written agreement to remain absent during ten years?"

"That agreement would be utterly valueless," sneered La Cadière. "A man has no right to sign away his liberty, and even if he consented to do so, there is no law to compel him to keep his word."

"Nevertheless, at the very first violation of the agreement, I should denounce you and produce proofs of the truth of my accusation."

"Why don't you produce the proofs now, if you have them?"

"I shall, if you don't accept my conditions; and I wish you to distinctly understand that by the word 'violation,' I mean any attack upon Madame de Marcenac or Madame Larmor; for instance, any anonymous letters that you might venture to write to Monsieur Larmor or to any official. It would not be the first time that you have stooped to slandering a woman."

"I don't understand what you mean, and I beg you to explain yourself more clearly."

"It isn't necessary," replied the colonel, determined to avoid all idle discussion. "I am sure of what I assert; and if the attempt is repeated, I shall know that the letter is from you, and act accordingly; so you are warned."

"You are really very kind to take such an interest in my welfare. If I were in your place, I should go to the house of the person who has charge of the papers with which you threaten me, and ask him to lend them to me to enable me to convict Basfroï's murderer. Would you like me to tell you where you ought to look for them? Basfroï could only have entrusted them to an intimate friend. He had but one, and that was a retired merchant, who had been associated with him in business years ago. His name was Chardin, and Basfroï frequently consulted him about financial matters."

"You seem to be much better informed than I am," replied the colonel, not wishing to admit that his adversary had hit the mark in mentioning Chardin's name. La Cadière was evidently trying to discover if he had guessed right, so as to make arrangements to prevent the production of any compromising evidence. The *ruse* was apparent, and Sigoulès did not allow himself to be caught by it. He was satisfied now. It was certainly Chardin who had been in the usurer's confidence.

"You see I am not in the least afraid, for I give you this information of my own accord," continued La Cadière, with unblushing effrontery. "Go and find old Chardin, and make him tell you what he knows. I would gladly give you his address, but, unfortunately, I don't know it. Madame de Marcenac does, however; for she is as well acquainted with Chardin as she was with Basfroï. I will wait until you have seen him."

"I care nothing about this man. All I require is that you should answer me one way or the other."

"Come, colonel, do me the favour to reason calmly. You certainly can't expect that I am going to ask for pen, ink, and paper to sign the pledge you require of me. I might as well confess myself to be Basfroï's murderer. Nor can you expect that as soon as I leave the club I shall take a train and rush across the frontier. Make an appointment to meet me here on the day after to-morrow, at this same hour. You shall bring your proofs, and I will bring mine, and I am sure that we shall succeed in coming to an understanding. You incur no risk by consenting to this arrangement, for I remain at your service. Do you think I may escape by leaving Paris this evening? It would not be to my interest to do so, for, with your impetuous disposition, you might publish a denunciation against me, and as my flight would be regarded as a confession of guilt, I should soon be arrested and brought back by the aid of the telegraph. As for the written agreement you require of me, it is useless, and worse than useless, and I think you would find it very difficult to get such a document recorded. Give me forty-eight hours; that is all I ask."



This was a clever plea, and the colonel hesitated. He could do nothing more at present, for want of actual proofs—proofs which he hoped to secure; and this man had just told him where to look for them. It was not at all likely that Cadière would abscond without trying to destroy them if they existed. The main thing, therefore, was to reach Chardin's house in advance of the culprit. Was the latter sincere when he pretended to be ignorant of Chardin's address? At all events he could not be a favourite with the retired merchant, and would, therefore, have a good deal of trouble in persuading him to give up the compromising documents, while Sigoulès, by reason of his intimacy with Lizy and his devotion to the Countess de Marcenac, might reasonably hope that Chardin would not refuse to show him the precious memoranda, supposing they were in his possession. But it was of great importance that he should be first in the field, and fortunately Roger de Bussière, who knew the address, was close at hand. This fact decided him. "Very well," said he; "I consent to the truce, and will meet you here on the day after to-morrow at six o'clock in the evening; if I don't find you here, I shall be at the prefecture of police twenty minutes afterwards."

"You will not be put to that inconvenience," smilingly replied the viscount, who seemed to have regained all his wonted assurance. And after bowing politely to Sigoulès, he hurried out of the room.

As the colonel was anxious not to allow the viscount time to confer with Roger de Bussière, who could not be far off, unless he had deserted his post, he closely followed him, flying down the stairs three at a time. However, on reaching the boulevard he could see nothing whatever of the former quartermaster. "Where the devil has he gone?" growled Sigoulès, greatly vexed. "What if that rascal La Cadière has already bribed him? I ought not to have left him. This will teach me not to place any confidence in these so-called converts again!"

However, he began searching for his former comrade, looking at all the shops to see if he had not stopped in front of some show-window; and after spending some little time in this way, he was surprised to catch sight of Roger peeping cautiously out of a narrow alley, and beckoning him to approach. "Has he lost his senses, or is he only playing a joke on me?" muttered Sigoulès. However, he complied with Roger's gesture; and as soon as he came within speaking distance, he angrily asked: "What do you mean by this manoeuvre? Why are you hiding? Have you seen one of your creditors?"

"No, no, but La Cadière just passed by," replied Roger. "I am not certain that he didn't see me, although I took the precaution to hide myself here. He was going towards a cab, the last one on the rank there, and I think he drove off in it; however, it would be as well for you to satisfy yourself that he is no longer about here?"

"I don't see anything of him; but why do you take so many precautions?"

"Why, I thought you intended to go and see old Chardin; and in that case La Cadière must not see us together. He knows that I am acquainted with Chardin, and if he imagined that I was going to take you there, he might decide to follow us."

"You are right; I did not think of that. I congratulate you; you certainly are much shrewder than I am. I just told him that I would place convincing proofs of his guilt in the hands of the investigating magistrate; and if these proofs exist, they must be in Chardin's possession.

Of course I know nothing at all about them, but I assured him that I did; and the announcement seemed to trouble him very much."

"Then we must make haste. Fortunately he did not remain to watch us, and I am quite sure that he doesn't know the address of Basfroi's old friend. You didn't tell him, I hope."

"I'm not such a fool. He is capable of treating Chardin as he treated the usurer at Fontainebleau. He will succeed in discovering the address, perhaps, but we shall reach the house in advance of him, and we can warn Chardin to be on his guard. Come, open the door of the first cab and jump in, after telling the driver where to go. I myself will get in afterwards."

Roger obeyed; Sigoulès gave a last glance up and down the boulevard, the cabman climbed upon the box, and the vehicle rolled along towards the Bastille. "Did you have any conversation with La Cadière?" inquired Roger, as soon as they had started.

"Yes; and I no longer have the shadow of a doubt. It was he who strangled Basfroi; but he has not derived much advantage from the crime, for he lost the stolen money last night at baccarat. I found him trying to borrow some coin from the club croupier, and I told him very plainly that I knew he was the murderer. He tried to sneer at first, but I soon put a stop to that by reminding him of the Marseilles fiasco."

"Perhaps you made a mistake in mentioning that; he must have guessed you had seen me."

"He said as much, and made some uncomplimentary remarks about you. But I did not take the trouble to contradict them. I told him that I would give him just forty-eight hours to accede to my proposal, and that if he still refused, I should then denounce him. He did not seem at all disconcerted, and if I were not satisfied that he really committed the crime, I should have been deceived by his infernal assurance. However, he consented to keep the appointment, at six o'clock on Wednesday evening, at the club."

"I don't believe he will come. He will pack up his trunks and bolt: see if he doesn't!"

"So much the better; that is exactly what I want him to do. Meanwhile, the best thing I can do now is to see Chardin, who is well acquainted with all Basfroi's business transactions. When he learns that I require the information for the purpose of defending Madame de Marcenac and avenging the death of his friend, he will be communicative enough, never fear."

"I think it would be better for me not to show myself," said Roger. "He must know that the countess has not a very good opinion of me."

"Well, I, too, have ceased to enjoy her favour; but I don't think she has yet told Chardin about me; indeed, it is more than likely that she has never mentioned my name to him. I don't think I shall have any difficulty in introducing myself to the old gentleman. The name of my friend Paul de Lizy will be the best introduction I'm sure, and I will tell him some facts which will convince him that I am solely acting in the interest of Madame de Marcenac. While I am making my call, you must wait for me at the end of the street, and I shall probably need your assistance when the interview is over."

"I am entirely at your service; and, I will keep a sharp look-out, for La Cadière may have followed us."

"I did not see any sign of him."

"That's no proof. He is a cunning rascal; there is no doubt of it."

The conversation began to flag. Sigoulès was thinking over what he should say to this old man whom he had never before seen. The subject which he wished to broach was extremely delicate, and it would be necessary for him to proceed with great tact and caution. Unfortunately he had a marked inclination to hurry matters, being prone to conducting a negotiation much as he would have led a charge upon the enemy. He was conscious of this fault, and as they drove along, he lectured himself soundly, in the hope that he would display none of his usual rashness in his interview with Chardin. Roger was silent out of deference to his companion. He plainly understood that he had no voice in the matter, and that gratitude commanded implicit obedience to the old comrade who had so generously offered him a helping hand. However he perceived the weak points in Sigoulès' plan; and he resolved to interfere—although very cautiously—should interference prove necessary to prevent his protector from committing any act of folly. The vehicle at last turned into the Rue de Turenne, and thence into the Rue Saint Antoine which it followed as far as the Rue Saint Paul. It entered the Rue des Lions before the colonel, absorbed in his reflections, was aware of the fact. "Here we are!" said Roger, turning the knob that rings the driver's bell.

The vehicle drew up. "Your friend Chardin resides in a rather gloomy-looking street," growled the colonel, as he glanced out of the cab door.

"Yes, it is a rather lonely neighbourhood after sunset; but at this hour there is no danger." They both alighted, and Roger ordered the driver to wait for them at the corner. "I must take another look at the house," whispered Bussière. "It is a long time since I was here, and I may be mistaken. But no, that house with the pointed gable is certainly the one; this wall encloses the garden, and here is the door."

"A regular prison door; look at the heavy bars and bolts! The old man certainly takes care of himself. There is no light to be seen. Heaven grant that he hasn't gone to bed!"

"Oh, no! if you see no light it is probably because the shutters are closed. Well, I'll hurry off. I shall select our cab at the corner as my place of ambush."

Roger thereupon hurried away, keeping close in the shadow of the wall, and the colonel gave the bell a vigorous pull; indeed, he pulled it so hard that a loud and prolonged peal followed. "This isn't an ordinary door-bell, but a regular convent one," soliloquised the colonel. "Gracious! how it rings! It would wake the dead."

Nevertheless there was no stir in the house. Sigoulès could not hear the slightest sound, although he listened attentively. He stepped back and looked up at the house; every shutter was securely closed; but on looking more carefully it seemed to him that a slender thread of light stole out between the shutters of the window nearest the garden. The colonel then rang even more loudly than before, but with no better success. The house still remained dark and silent.

"I begin to think there is no one at home," grumbled Sigoulès. "Chardin is, perhaps, dining out to-day. But no, he is an old snail that never creeps out of his shell. If he were dining anywhere, it would be with the countess, and she has something else to attend to to-day. Perhaps he is afraid to open the door. The tragical death of his Fontainebleau friend may have made him distrustful. However, he must let me in, even if I have to bombard his old house with stones."

However, before resorting to that expedient, he again seized hold of the knob and pulled it with such violence that the bell rang loudly enough to startle all the neighbours. After a minute or two of this violent exercise, he paused to listen, and fancied he heard footsteps approaching from within. He then began to hammer upon the door with his fist, and a voice suddenly asked : "Who's there?"

"A friend!" replied the colonel, much as he would have replied to the challenge of a sentinel. Indeed he very narrowly escaped adding: "First Regiment, African Chasseurs!"

"I don't know you. Who are you, and what do you want?" once more asked the voice, which, by the way, was rather tremulous and anxious.

"I come on behalf of Madame de Marcenac. Open the door. I have an important message to deliver to Monsieur Chardin; and if you refuse to open the door, I shall hold you accountable for whatever may happen."

This time the bolts were drawn, a big key grated in the lock, the door was partially opened, and the face of an old man appeared, a terrified face, which at any other time would have excited the colonel's mirth. Judging by Bussière's description this face was certainly that of Chardin. The old man had a candle in his hand, and he raised it so that the light might fall on his visitor's face, but he did not seem inclined to let go his hold on the door. "But you are a stranger to me, sir," he stammered.

"However, I must have an interview with you for the sake of the countess. Let me in. Good heavens! do you take me for a thief? I am Colonel Sigoulès, and now that you know my name, have the goodness to open the door. I will tell you the rest when I am inside the house."

Although Chardin had never heard the name of this importunate visitor before, he finally concluded to make way for him; for he had once served as a captain in the National Guard, and stood in great awe of his superior officers. Sigoulès hastily availed himself of the opportunity thus afforded; whereupon the old man closed the door, barricaded it on the inside, and conducted the colonel to the staircase. Sigoulès ascended the first, without any ceremony, for he strongly suspected that Chardin was afraid of being attacked from the rear. As soon as the colonel was ushered into the room where the old man slept he seated himself astride a chair, and exclaimed: "Zounds! my dear sir, you guard yourself much better than the French army did during the war against Prussia."

"Ah! stammered Chardin; "this is a rather unfrequented street at night-time and I am quite alone in the house; besides, I had no expectation of receiving a message from Madame de Marcenac. Have you been acquainted with her long?"

"Only a short time; but I have known Monsieur de Lizy thirteen years. We served in the same regiment in the winter of '70. Lizy and Madame de Marcenac are not on very good terms just now. I am aware of that, but it is only a lovers' quarrel, and the object of my visit to you is to ask your assistance in bringing about a reconciliation."

"I—I don't understand you exactly."

"Well, there is a certain Viscount de la Cadière, of whom your poor friend Basfroi often spoke to you; well, it was this same Cadière who murdered your friend."

"I have heard the same opinion expressed before; but there is nothing to prove the truth of the accusation."

"Not yet, perhaps. But this is certain: he has basely slandered the countess, and is now trying to implicate her in the murder. Besides, he

has conducted himself in the most dishonourable manner towards one of Madame de Marcenac's friends—Madame Larmor. He pretends to have been her lover, and boasted of it in the presence of her husband. The latter threatens to kill her, and perhaps has already done so."

"I know nothing at all about it," protested Chardin, eagerly. "I assure you that I haven't seen her."

"I believe you; for she is compelled to conceal herself, or is else kept a close prisoner by her husband. For these reasons I determined to circumvent this La Cadière. I started out in pursuit of him and found him. In fact, I just left him at a club to which we both belong, and where I told him plainly enough that if he did not leave France within forty-eight hours I should deliver him up to justice."

"Have you any means, then, of proving that he is guilty?"

"No; but you have all that is necessary to convict him in your possession. I know that you were Basfroi's confidant and adviser. So I am convinced that you have in your possession a copy of his account-book or some memoranda——"

"You are greatly mistaken," exclaimed Chardin, who was unwilling to reveal to a stranger, or, indeed, to any one, a secret which by right belonged to Madame de Marcenac.

"Indeed! But Monsieur de la Cadière agrees with me in believing that you have some papers which will ruin him. I read it in his face when I spoke of you."

"When you spoke of me to him! Do you want him to come here and murder me? Ah, monsieur! what an injury you have done me by thus marking me as this scoundrel's victim!"

"You evidently have these papers, as you are afraid he will kill you to obtain possession of them. But have no fears, he doesn't know where you live, and I took good care not to tell him."

"But he is aware of my existence, and it won't be difficult for him to discover my address. I'm lost!"

"Nonsense! am I not here to defend you? Besides, it only depends upon yourself to be freed from him for ever. Entrust the papers to me, and I will take care of the rest."

Chardin, in his profound consternation, was on the point of opening his *escritoire* and giving the list of Basfroi's debtors to the man who offered to protect him from the machinations of the dangerous viscount; but a suspicion which suddenly darted through his brain prevented him from yielding to this impulse. This colonel, or pretended colonel, might merely be an emissary of the assassin. Chardin had never seen him either at Madame de Marcenac's house, or with the Baron de Lizy, whom he frequently met. There was nothing to prove that he was what he pretended to be. "And who knows but it may be the viscount himself!" thought the old fellow, in abject terror. "I never saw La Cadière, but Basfroi often described him to me, and his description corresponds in some respects, at least, with this man's appearance. If I continue to deny any knowledge of the papers, he may wring my neck, and break open my *escritoire*, where he will find the list; while if I give it to him, we shall have no proofs against him, and I shall betray the trust that Madame de Marcenac confided to me."

"Well, my dear sir," continued Sigoulès, kindly; "are you at last satisfied that I am right, and that it would be advisable to trust me with the weapon which you perhaps dislike to avail yourself of, but which I will turn to good use, I assure you?"

Chardin was growing desperate, when a sudden inspiration came to his relief. "I should like nothing better," he replied; "but, unfortunately it is impossible this evening, for I did not dare to keep the papers that Basfroi intrusted to me, here. I placed them in the hands of a banker of my acquaintance, of whose existence Monsieur de la Cadière hasn't the slightest knowledge."

"Well," said the colonel, "you can withdraw these papers whenever you please, no doubt. It will answer every purpose if I can have them to-morrow, as I shan't see La Cadière again till the day after. Go to your friend's establishment to-morrow morning, and let us agree, if you please, that I shall call for the papers to-morrow evening."

Chardin hung his head. He had invented this falsehood to get rid of a suspicious visitor, and he found himself caught in his own trap. The visitor would not fail to return for the list. However, the old fellow had, at least, warded off any immediate danger, and before twenty-hours had elapsed, he could inform Madame de Marcenac of this strange invasion of his home, and ask her if she really knew this colonel, and if it were advisable to give him Basfroi's list. So far as he, Chardin himself, was concerned, such an arrangement would be a great relief, if he could only make sure that he would have no further trouble with this frightful viscount or his accomplices; for he was not at all anxious to appear in person before the investigating magistrate, although he had so promised to Madame de Marcenac. He had not seen her since she had trusted Madame Larmor to his care; but he was expecting a visit from her at any moment. Indeed, it was in anticipation of her speedy arrival that he had sent his servant away as soon as his dinner was over. "My dear sir," continued Sigoulès in the hope of overcoming the worthy man's hesitation, "I do not need these papers to-night, as I shall not be able to use them against our common enemy until the day after to-morrow, and the arrangement I suggest to you offers one advantage, which I am sure you will appreciate. I am a stranger to you, and you can hardly be expected to believe me implicitly; so, before going to your banker, see the countess; question her about me, and ask her advice on the matter. Request her, if you like, to be here to-morrow at the hour I mentioned. I promise to submit to her decision. If she thinks it advisable to do nothing, I will let the matter drop; for it is only for her sake that I take any interest in the affair."

After such an assurance as this, uttered in a frank, firm voice, Chardin was obliged to surrender. "I agree to your proposal," he replied, eagerly. "You have satisfied a scruple which I felt. I certainly hesitated to entrust these notes to you, for it seemed to me that I had no right to dispose of them without Madame de Marcenac's knowledge; but I am willing to give them to you with her permission."

"That is all I ask," cried Sigoulès. "I am delighted to have made your acquaintance, and hope to prove to you beyond a doubt that I am henceforth your friend, as well as that of the countess and Paul de Lizy. They have quarrelled; but you and I are now in accord, and as union gives strength, we will see if we don't marry them yet."

"I sincerely hope that I may live to see them united," replied Chardin, gravely.

Sigoulès had risen to go, and his venerable host took up a candle to light him out. "You have a spacious room here," said the colonel, glancing around him. "The house is an old one, but I see that you have furnished it in the modern style. You have two floors here, I believe?"

"No; there is but one storey above the basement," replied Chardin, blushing; "at least, only one habitable storey. The upper windows you see are in a sort of loft, not fit for occupancy. No one ever goes up there; but I have a garden——"

"Yes; enclosed by a wall; I noticed it. And, by the way, keep a sharp watch, and be on your guard. La Cadière suspects that you have Basfroi's papers, and he may find out where you live."

"Ah, sir, how deeply I regret that you said anything to him about me. My wall is protected with strong iron spikes, however, and I shall only open my door when I am sure who the visitor is."

"You know me by the way I ring. I will announce myself by a long, loud peal, like the one I gave this evening."

Chardin did not care to have any one make such a commotion at his door, especially now that Madame Larmor was beneath his roof; however, he made no rejoinder. He accompanied Sigoulès to the street door, shook hands with him, and re-barricaded the door most securely as soon as his unexpected visitor had set foot on the pavement.

The colonel felt greatly relieved, and thereupon hastened away to join Roger and inform him of the result of the undertaking. He could see the cab-lamps gleaming in the distance, and directed his course towards them. The driver was fast asleep on the box, and Roger de Bussière—to Sigoulès' great surprise—was crouching between the vehicle and the wall. "What are you doing here?" asked the colonel.

"Don't speak so loud," responded Roger, in a whisper.

"Why? are you afraid Chardin might hear us? He is in bed by this time; and, by the way, he really has Basfroi's papers, and he is going to give them to me to-morrow evening. The matter is virtually settled."

"He will give them to you, if he still has them. But you ought to have taken them when you could get them. La Cadière now knows where the old man lives. He followed us, as I was afraid he would."

"In a vehicle, then?"

"Of course; and I was right to distrust him when I saw him coming out of the club-house. You thought he had gone off, but he must have slunk into one of the last cabs on the rank, and have told the driver to watch us while he concealed himself inside. Then, after waiting until we had started, he no doubt ordered the driver to follow us at a little distance. It couldn't have happened otherwise. He probably alighted at the corner of the Rue Saint Antoine, for he knew that another vehicle in the Rue Saint Paul would certainly attract our attention. The fact is, you had scarcely entered Chardin's house when I saw a man gliding along close to the houses, on the other side of the street. It was very dark; but I can see pretty well at night-time, and I crouched down between our vehicle and the wall, so that he might not suspect I was here."

"Good! But he went away, didn't he?"

"Yes; but he'll be back soon, I'm almost certain of it. He crept stealthily along until he was opposite Chardin's house; he paused, and stood looking at it some minutes; then he crossed the street, and approaching the garden-wall, seemed to measure the height of it with his eye. Our driver was already asleep, and as the viscount walked slowly past he could see that the cab was vacant, for the windows were down. He therefore probably came to the conclusion that we were both in Chardin's house. Afterwards, he waited for a quarter of an hour, perhaps,

perfectly motionless, like a man absorbed in thought; but finally he hastened off, down the Rue Saint Paul."

"The deuce! he must be plotting some mischief. I have a great mind to return to Chardin's, and tell him that the scoundrel is hanging about the house."

"Chardin wouldn't open the door for you again, I'm afraid."

"He took his time about it before, as you probably noticed."

"We had better resort to a little strategy. Suppose I pull up the carriage-windows, and lower the curtains. Then we will pay the driver and dismiss him. If La Cadière meets him, he will think the man is taking us away; if he doesn't meet him, he will come back to see if the cab is still here, and meanwhile we can hide at the end of the street, and see what he intends to do."

"That is not a bad scheme, certainly. We must see if La Cadière will return. Pull down the inside blinds, as you propose, while I settle with the driver."

Roger performed his task with wonderful dexterity, and Sigoulès awoke the cabman, placed a five-franc piece in his hand, and told him to drive off. As soon as the vehicle had turned round the corner of the Rue Saint Antoine, the two friends began to explore the dimly-lighted street they were in. They passed Chardin's house, and a little further on, in a wall over the way, they found a sort of niche in which they decided to conceal themselves. From this spot they could watch without much danger of being seen; for their hiding-place was enshrouded in darkness, while at the corner of the Rue Saint Paul, near Chardin's garden-wall, there was a street-lamp, thanks to which all passers-by were distinctly visible.

"What do you suppose are La Cadière's intentions?" asked the colonel, as soon as he and Roger were hidden in their corner.

"I think he is going to try to get into Chardin's house. There is the garden-wall, mind."

"But, it is at least twelve feet high; and it bristles with iron spikes. The viscount would have to bring a ladder——"

"I don't know how he will manage it; but I fancy he will attempt to get over the wall. To my mind he went away to procure the necessary implements."

"But, my dear fellow, you forget that it is hardly eight o'clock, and that we are in Paris."

"The residents of the Marais go to roost at the same time as their fowls. No one but La Cadière has gone down the street since I first mounted guard, more than an hour ago."

"But the police will certainly make their rounds, and La Cadière must be very bold to run the risk of being arrested as a thief," said Sigoulès; "besides, he saw me enter the house, and he may think that the papers have passed from Chardin's hands into mine."

"He will hope that you were not able to come to an understanding. Besides, he has no choice. In any case, we incur no risk by waiting for him," remarked Roger.

"Except the risk of taking cold, perhaps. It is beginning to rain; I felt a drop just now. We may have to remain here on guard all night."

"You? Oh, no; this is no place for a colonel; but I will keep watch until to-morrow morning."

"You are still the same Bussière I knew in old times—a thorough soldier. Well, we will wait."



They did wait, and much longer than they expected. The street was deserted. Some persons occasionally passed along the Rue Beautreillis, at the end of the Rue des Lions; but they walked on, without turning into the street where Chardin resided. There were no signs of life in the latter's house, and no sounds broke the silence of the night, save the distant rumbling of vehicles in the Rue Saint Antoine, and the confused murmur which always pervades Paris. The church clocks struck nine, and Sigoulès, who was beginning to feel impatient, muttered: "He is certainly not coming. It is probable that he is warming his feet at a good fire, while we are standing here in the rain. He has fooled us this time, sure enough."

"I don't think so," replied Roger; "he is only waiting, so as to have a better chance of working undisturbed. If we desert our post now, we shall, perhaps, miss our man by a minute. But, no," added Roger, placing his hand on Sigoulès' arm. "Just look over there!"

A shadowy figure could now be seen at the end of the street. "What of that?" said the colonel; "it is only some honest citizen returning home. Heaven grant that he may not catch a glimpse of us as he passes."

"Don't you see how strangely he acts? He keeps close to the wall like a cat watching a mouse, and stops every second minute to listen. Look at him now, he is standing right in the middle of the street, just in front of Chardin's garden. It is La Cadière; I am sure of it. I recognise him now. Silence in the ranks!"

Sigoulès obeyed. Their rôles seemed to have suddenly been reversed. It was the subordinate who gave orders now, and the colonel who obeyed. The man they were watching did not move. He seemed to be listening, and trying to pierce the surrounding gloom to see if he were observed. After some minutes' hesitation, he approached the wall and assumed the position of a whaler preparing to hurl his harpoon. At the end of about ten seconds, probably employed in measuring the distance, his right arm, which had previously been drawn up, was suddenly and violently extended to its full length, evidently for the purpose of throwing some object that he held in his hand. "Ah! he is throwing a rope-ladder," whispered Roger. "What did I tell you? And he has managed to get a hold for the ladder the very first time."

"A hold on what?" asked Sigoulès.

"Why, on the spikes on the top of the wall. It must be a double ladder. If he kept us waiting so long, it was because he either had to go and buy it or fetch it at his house. He must be provided with all the implements of his profession. He certainly is a clever rascal. He remembered the iron spikes, and saw that they would answer every purpose. The ladder is fast now. Poor Chardin little thought that the formidable array of spikes with which he protected his wall would only facilitate a scoundrel's attack upon his fortress. But, see! La Cadière is climbing up!"

In fact, after pulling hard at the ladder to see if it was securely fastened, the new comer had deliberately began the ascent, and had already mounted several rungs.

"Let us spring upon him!" exclaimed the colonel, but Roger whispered earnestly: "Don't think of it; that would spoil everything, for he would certainly make his escape. He won't begin by killing Chardin, for the very good reason that he doesn't know where the papers which he wishes to appropriate are kept. He will first try to coax the old man to give them up; he may even have some means by which he can persuade Chardin to sur-

render them with a good grace, and in that case he won't kill him until afterwards. Chardin will be terribly frightened, and he will undoubtedly yield in the belief that he will save his life by doing so; however, he won't yield without discussion, and that will take up some time.

"There he is on the top of the wall!" interrupted the colonel, eagerly, "and, look, he is going down on the other side."

"And he has also ensured his safe retreat, the crafty old fox! When he has accomplished his undertaking, he will return in the same way he came by, that is, if we don't interfere. But it will be time enough for that in five minutes or so, when he has entered the house. We shall lose nothing by waiting. I intend to catch him in the act of threatening the old man, and then use his ladder to tie him up."

"We shall have to use it ourselves first."

"Remember, colonel, that your weight is in proportion with your height. The ladder would probably break under you. I am almost certain that it wouldn't bear you; besides, La Cadière is probably armed. My life isn't of much value, but yours is. If either of us is to receive a bullet or a knife-thrust, it had better be me."

"Enough of that kind of talk! I am your superior officer, and it is my duty to lead the charge. As to my weight, I know what it is. Don't be alarmed; a ladder that will bear La Cadière's weight will bear mine."

"But you will, at least, let me go first? I insist upon it. Let us go now."

Leaving their ambuscade, they hastened to the foot of the ladder. It proved to be very strong, and had probably been made for a gymnasium, although it was very much like the ladders used by firemen. "It is made of very strong rope," said Roger, after he had examined it closely, "and it may perhaps bear your weight. I am going to try it. After I have disappeared on the other side of the wall, give me time to reach the ground. If I find myself in La Cadière's clutches on setting foot in the garden, I will call you; but that is not a probable contingency."

As Roger concluded, he caught hold of the sides of the ladder with both hands and began to climb. Sigoulès, who could not bear to remain idle, seized the bottom of the ladder, and held it firmly to facilitate his comrade's ascent. Roger was as slender as he had been at the age of twenty-five, and almost as agile; and in the twinkling of an eye he reached the top of the wall. Having paused for an instant to make signs to the colonel that La Cadière was not visible, he then climbed over the iron spikes without much difficulty, and disappeared. Sigoulès had concluded to obey Roger's injunctions, so he waited, gnawing his moustache and stamping impatiently. "I have certainly engaged in a strange escapade," he growled. "If the police should happen to make their round and see me, they would certainly arrest me, and carry me to the station-house without any ceremony. The charge would be attempted burglary; and I am running this delightful risk in the hope of serving a lady who is probably anathematising me in her secret heart, while Paul de Lizy, the fool, is preparing to start for Monaco, in the hope of ruining himself there. He has, perhaps, even started before now. I must have a good deal of affection for them both to engage in this wild-goose chase for their sakes. But I hear nothing; and Roger has had time to call me a dozen times, if he had found himself face to face with La Cadière. The time has come for me to prove that I am still capable of storming a fort, and to remember my former skill in gymnastics."

After looking up and down the street to satisfy himself that no one was in sight, the colonel stepped upon the first rung of the ladder, which stretched in an alarming manner, and succeeded in climbing up, though it cost him a great effort. Reaching the summit without any accident, his real difficulties then began, for he was obliged to cling to the bristling spikes with his hands, and turn a sort of somersault. Sigoulès succeeded in his strange gymnastic performance, but not without tearing his trousers and bruising himself; and his feet, after dangling for an instant in mid-air, at last came in contact with the part of the ladder hanging on the garden side. The rest was a mere trifle, as some one in the garden—Roger, undoubtedly—held the ladder firmly, to prevent it from swaying to and fro. The colonel did not pause in his descent; and was soon caught in the arms of Roger de Bussière, who whispered, "La Cadière is no longer in the garden, but he is in the house, which is not far off. I see a door open there on our left. It was by that door that he went in."

"Then we can make use of it as well," replied Sigoulès.

"Yes; it is now your turn to go first; I know nothing about the inside arrangement of the house."

"Nor do I; at least, I know nothing about this part, as the stairs I saw were on the side of the street; but there must be another flight leading from the garden to the room where Chardin conducted me. It was there, undoubtedly, that La Cadière found him."

Sigoulès now started on in advance, Roger keeping close behind him. Although the night was dark, they found their way to the foot of some stairs without much difficulty. The colonel caught hold of the bannister and ascended cautiously, closely followed by Roger, both of them walking on tiptoe. They soon reached a landing from which started another flight of stairs, which Sigoulès soon recognised, for it was the same he had ascended on his former visit. Through a partially open door filtered a faint ray of light, and they could distinctly hear two people in conversation, the low and trembling voice of Chardin alternating with the loud and imperious tones of the Viscount de la Cadière.

"But, my dear sir," La Cadière was saying, "the favour I ask is the merest trifle. I have learned from a reliable source that poor Basfroi recently entrusted to your keeping a list of his debtors, and that this list, written by himself, also gives the amount of each note, and any payments which may have been made respecting it. Indeed, it was he himself who told me this the last time I saw him at Fontainebleau, where I went to make the final payment on my own account some time ago."

"BASFROI was mistaken," stammered the old man. "He probably intended to entrust the list to me—although I do not understand his motive—but he never did so."

"You say you don't understand what his motive could have been! It was probably as a sort of precaution in case any misfortune befell him. He told me a hundred times that among his customers there was one who would probably kill him some day or other to regain possession of his notes without opening his purse: and so he took this precaution in the hope that his assassin might be captured, even if he destroyed the account-books as well as the notes. Now, it happens that certain mischievous people of my acquaintance have circulated some very malicious reports respecting my relations with Basfroi. They dare not accuse me openly as yet, but they will soon do so, and I want to silence them by showing them

this list upon which, appended to my name, will be recorded the date at which I paid my last note."

"I assure you that I have no such list."

"Take care, my dear sir. I don't intend to go away empty-handed."

La Cadière's voice was becoming threatening, and there was no doubt but that, having tried persuasion in vain, the viscount meant to resort to violence. "Do you think I would refuse to give you this paper if it were here?" asked Chardin, dolefully.

"Look for it, then; I am sure that you will find it," replied the viscount. "See, there is an *escritoire* which seems to me to have been made expressly to hold documents of that sort. Open it, and when it is open, you and I will take an inventory of its contents together."

"The *escritoire*!" stammered Chardin, in the most abject terror.

"Ah! the fool lied to me," thought the colonel, who was listening.

"The list is here, and La Cadière has guessed correctly where the old man has concealed it. Matters would certainly turn out badly if we were not on hand."

"Well, my dear sir," resumed the Provençal, without concealing the southern accent, which with him was a sure sign of anger or excitement, "make up your mind; I have no time to lose. The key of the *escritoire* is in your pocket. Hand it me, if you please." The old man only replied by a groan. "You have exhausted my patience at last, and you shall suffer for it," continued La Cadière. "Will you or will you not give me the key? No; well, I shall take it from you, and wring your neck afterwards."

A cry of terror was the only answer to this threat, which had probably been carried into immediate execution. Sigoulès and Roger did not need to consult each other. With the same impulse they sprang to the door and pushed it open. It was high time they did so. La Cadière had the unfortunate Chardin by the throat, and his victim was already unable to shriek for aid; but the villain was standing with his back to the door, and before he could turn, two men were upon him. Sigoulès seized him around the body, and Roger by the throat, and with such an iron grip that the wretch, losing his breath, relaxed his hold on the old man, who fell, half suffocated, into an arm-chair. "Chardin!" cried the colonel; "bring a napkin, a towel—the first piece of cloth or linen you can find."

The old man scarcely knew where he was, or what he was doing; but fear lent him strength to rise and come to the aid of his defenders. He saw a large woollen muffler lying upon a chair, and carried it to the colonel, who said: "Adjust it yourself, my dear friend; you see that our hands are not free. Gag the wretch, and after you have done that, try to find some ropes to bind him."

"Help! help! Murder! murder!" Thus did La Cadière, who had recognised Sigoulès' voice, try to shriek, but his words were choked back by the relentless grasp of Roger. However, the scoundrel struggled so violently to free himself that his captors had considerable difficulty in holding him. Had they been less occupied, they would certainly have heard the sound of hurried footsteps on the staircase leading from the floor above, the floor on which Chardin had lodged Madame Larmor. However, the colonel and his auxiliary were both so engaged with La Cadière that the noise was not detected by them. The viscount was making furious efforts to free himself and to cry out. He also endeavoured to kick, but did not succeed; for Sigoulès held his legs between his own.

Chardin, who had suddenly regained his courage, placed the muffler over the viscount's head, in such a way as to cover his eyes and close his mouth, tied it securely under his chin, opened a cupboard from which he drew a coil of rope, and then returned to complete his work. "Bind his feet first," said Sigoulès; "and tie the knots tightly."

Chardin complied, and then turned his attention to La Cadière's arms, which he fastened securely to his sides; in fact, when he had finished his task, no prisoner who ever suffered death upon the guillotine was more securely bound than this Provençal, who so richly deserved to end his days upon the scaffold. One would have supposed that the old fellow had never done anything but bind people all his life. It is true that he had tied up many a bale of goods, when he was serving his apprenticeship as a shop-boy. "Now, gentlemen, you can rest," he remarked, when his task was ended; "I am sure that he cannot move."

The gentlemen were satisfied that such was indeed the fact; so they laid La Cadière down upon the floor. Roger even paid him the delicate attention of slipping under his head a round leather cushion belonging to the office-chair in which M. Chardin habitually sat. The viscount did not move, but he emitted a series of groans. "He is suffocating!" said Chardin suddenly.

"I could see him die without any compunctions of conscience," replied the colonel. "Ah, Monsieur Chardin, you ought to thank us for rescuing you from his clutches! You see I bear you no ill will, although you played me a rather shabby trick an hour or two ago. Still, had it not been for you, I believe the scoundrel would have got the best of us after all. But what would have become of you if my comrade and myself had not conceived the happy idea of mounting guard in front of your house? La Cadière would have strangled you, and taken the precious list away with him, for it is here; I'm sure of it. Confess that you were trying to deceive me when you told me that you had taken it to your banker's for safe-keeping."

"Yes; I was wrong—I didn't know; but how did this man manage to get into my house?"

"He got over the garden wall with the aid of a rope-ladder, and we followed him. The ladder is still there, for we did not take time to remove it, and it is as well that we didn't. If we had tarried to amuse ourselves in that way, we should have arrived too late."

"But if a policeman saw it, he would certainly think that thieves had entered the house, and would summon other members of the force, who might break open my door; and if they found a man here bound like a calf, they would think we had bound him with the intention of murdering him."

"True, I didn't think of that. I don't want the police to meddle with our affairs. Roger, please go and remove the ladder. You will certainly find in the garden a pole long enough to reach to the top of the wall."

"There is a long pole with a hook at the end of it, a pole I use in pruning my trees, under the shed in the garden," remarked old Chardin.

"It will be very useful in removing the ladder from the iron spikes to which this rascal fastened it. We shall have no further use for it, as you will certainly open the door for us now."

"I will do whatever you wish; but you are not going to kill this man, I hope?"

"No; although, if we drew the muffler you have so dexterously

fastened round his neck a trifle tighter, he would share the fate of his victim. But jobs of that kind are not to my taste. A sword-thrust is more in my line; but I cannot fight a duel with a rascal of that stamp."

"No, no; certainly not. Still, if you released him——"

"I am not such a fool. I mean to shut him up. Is there a garret in your house?"

"No, no; I assure you there is nothing of the kind," protested Chardin, eagerly. "There is no room over mine."

"Nonsense! You can't persuade me that between this ceiling and the roof there is no garret, or loft, or vacant space; for that is all I need as a temporary prison for this nobleman."

"No, there's nothing, I give you my word of honour!" Chardin had not forgotten Madame Larmor; and he shuddered at the mere thought of giving her La Cadière as a companion in her captivity.

"But you must certainly have a cellar?"

"Yes, I have, but what use do you wish to make of it?"

"I intend to convert it into a prison for this noble viscount, Monsieur de la Cadière."

"What! imprison him in my house?" exclaimed Chardin, in a tone of terror.

"Oh, not for long; only until to-morrow; for to-morrow I shall see the Countess de Marcenac, and ask her what she wishes to be done with the scoundrel. It is probable that she will decide to hand him over to the authorities; but I don't like to assume the responsibility of delivering him up to justice without consulting her."

"But what you propose would be folly. He would certainly make his escape from the cellar——"

"Have no fear; we will board up the windows securely; besides, we will place him there in his present condition, just raising the muffler a little, so that he may breathe; I wish to preserve this precious specimen of the nobility alive. If he's hungry, you can take him something to eat, and unbind one arm so that he can feed himself."

"Never, never! Don't depend upon me for anything like that!"

"Oh, well; my friend will take care of him then. Here he comes now," the colonel added, as Roger re-entered the room, exclaiming: "I succeeded, all right, the ladder is in the shed."

"Very well; now remove the muffler from the noble viscount's face. I should like to talk with him a little before putting him in a safe place."

Roger complied. The first word that the prisoner uttered was: "Cowards!"

"Go on!" said Sigoulès, scornfully; "your insults don't trouble me in the least. I granted you a respite; you have seen fit to violate the treaty we had concluded, and you must now take the consequences of your conduct, and submit to be handed over to the tender mercies of the Court of Assizes."

"That woman Marcenac will go with me; that will be one comfort," interrupted the scamp. "I will ruin her reputation; I will swear in open court that she is the mistress of the Baron de Lizy! And I can prove my assertions about Madame Larmor, and her fool of a husband shall know——"

"Madame Larmor is beyond your reach. She has left France. Now, let us put an end to this. You heard me state my intentions, I suppose? Come, Bussière, lift this man up by the shoulders, and set him upon his feet. We two can help him along, or carry him, if necessary, to the cellar;

that is, if Monsieur Chardin will kindly show us where it is, and hold a light."

On hearing the name of Bussière, the prisoner turned, and recognised the colonel's assistant. "So it is you, cur!" he cried. "How much have you been paid for betraying me, you hound! you scum of the earth?"

Roger turned pale with anger, but without replying, he stooped to seize hold of La Cadière, who began to yell with all his might: "Murder! murder! Fire!" He undoubtedly hoped to attract the attention of the neighbours by his cries; but it was the door that communicated with the floor above that opened, and Madame Larmor who appeared upon the threshold. The colonel had only seen Madame Larmor on one occasion, but it was under very remarkable circumstances; besides, he seldom forgot a face. So he recognised her instantly, though he could scarcely believe his eyes. Nevertheless, it was she.

When Sigoulès rang for the first time, Chardin, after dismissing his servant, had just taken Madame Larmor her dinner. Frightened by the loud ringing, he had been unwilling to open the door; but she had persuaded him to do so by telling him that this noisy visitor would be likely to persevere in his efforts to obtain admission, and in this way draw the neighbours to the windows. During the interview between the colonel and Chardin she remained in her own room, silent and motionless; and Sigoulès had not had the slightest suspicion that there was any other person in the house. After the colonel's departure Chardin had gone upstairs again, and told Madame Larmor all that had been said to him by this gentleman, whom she so well remembered as a participant in the scene at the Continental Hôtel. This report, and, above all, the name of M. de la Cadière, which had been mentioned so often in the conversation, seemed to affect her deeply; but she carefully abstained from giving any expression to her real feelings, and after a long talk, she begged her host to leave her, alleging that she was not feeling very well, and needed rest. Chardin had just left her when the Viscount de la Cadière's threatening face appeared before him. The old fellow was nearly frightened to death, but we must do him the justice to say that he did not for a single instant forget Madame Larmor's terrible position. If La Cadière suspected that she was concealed in the room above, he would perhaps murder her; and the old man was in terror lest she should betray her presence by moving about. But she was some distance off, the door of the staircase was concealed by a tapestry-hanging, and La Cadière was not thinking by any means of the unfortunate woman who had been compelled to fly from her husband's roof on his account.

All had gone well at first. La Cadière had not talked very loud; and Madame Larmor, absorbed in her gloomy thoughts, had heard nothing that could lead her to suppose that Chardin was no longer alone. Even the noisy entrance of the colonel had passed unnoticed; but the viscount's struggles and cries had at last attracted the attention of the recluse, whose first impulse had been to hasten to the help of Chardin. She imagined that he was attacked, and hurried to the stairs without remembering that she was not strong enough to assist her host, or even to defend herself. Then the cries ceased. Suddenly the scoundrel had been gagged, and Madame Larmor could only distinguish two voices—the colonel giving orders, and Chardin remonstrating with him. She then concluded that her protector was in no danger, and that she would only embarrass him by interfering. She did not know who was there, and she failed to

understand the subject of the conversation ; for the sounds reached her but faintly through the heavy old door ; and although she could occasionally catch a word, she could not follow the conversation. She decided, therefore, to await the end of the strange adventure ; but instead of retiring to her room, she remained upon the staircase, anxious and watchful. Suddenly, however, she heard a fresh voice—a voice which she fancied she recognised, and which was raised to a much higher pitch than the others. In her astonishment and consternation she hastened to the door and placed her hand upon the knob. Just then, La Cadière cried out “ Murder ! ” and, unable to restrain herself any longer, Madame Larmor opened the door, and nearly swooned on seeing one man lying on the floor, bound like a prisoner condemned to death, and another man bending over him and apparently preparing to strangle him.

Sigoulès recoiled in surprise. Roger straightened himself up, and Chardin, in his consternation, sank back in an arm-chair, silent and motionless, La Cadière, who alone retained his presence of mind, cried out : “ Gabrielle, save me, save me ! they are trying to murder me ! ”

The wretch then endeavoured to drag himself towards Madame Larmor ; but the colonel caught her unceremoniously about the waist, lifted her up in his arms, carried her up to her room, and laid her upon the bed. She was only partially conscious ; but, regardless of the fact, he said, in a firm, almost unfeeling tone : “ You have just been guilty of a very foolish act. Do not repeat it. The fact that this man has been your lover makes no difference to me ; he deserves no pity. Besides, I have no intention of killing him ; I only wish to prevent him from doing you or Madame de Marcenac any further injury. I will get you away from here soon ; but don't move, if you wish me to save you, or if you have any regard for Madame de Marcenac. Besides, for greater safety, I am going to lock you in,” concluded Sigoulès, and he left Madame Larmor, who this time fairly fainted away.

Clearing the staircase at a bound, he then securely locked the door communicating with Chardin's apartment, and put the key in his pocket. Roger understood nothing of this scene, but he had the presence of mind to re-gag La Cadière, who was foaming with rage. Chardin still sat half-lifeless on the chair upon which he had fallen. “ Up ! ” cried Sigoulès. “ Where is the cellar ? Take a candle, and show us the way. We will discuss the matter afterwards.” Chardin mechanically obeyed. “ Take the viscount by the shoulders,” added the colonel, addressing Roger ; “ I will take hold of his legs. Have you got him ? Yes ? Now lift him ! ”

So La Cadière was lifted up in spite of his writhings and contortions. His captors were both of them powerful men, and there was not the slightest chance of his freeing himself. “ Go on ahead, Chardin ! ” ordered the colonel, as imperiously as if he was in command of his own troops. “ Have you the cellar key ? ” Chardin made a sign that it was in his pocket. “ Lead the way, then ! ”

Chardin conducted them to the side of the house next the garden, and there, under some steps they found a door leading to the cellar. On arriving there, La Cadière was laid upon the ground, which proved to be dry, as the owner of the house had a short time previously spread a thick layer of fine sand over the floor the better to preserve some bottles of choice wine which he kept there. “ The viscount will do very well here,” said Sigoulès, after glancing around. “ He won't lack air, as there is a grating in the upper part of the door ; and he won't starve, for I shall bring him some



breakfast to-morrow morning. Loosen the muffler a little, Roger, so that the viscount can breathe; but I don't wish him to be able to annoy Monsieur Chardin by any outcries. Now we can go."

As Sigoulès spoke, he pushed Chardin and Roger out of the cellar in which they had placed the viscount, locked the door and pocketed the key. Chardin looked on without daring to say a word. When they all three found themselves in Chardin's room again, the colonel turned to the old man, and asked: "Why didn't you tell me that Madame Larmor had taken refuge in your house?"

"Madame de Marcenac brought her here, and told me to keep the fact a secret," murmured Chardin.

"No matter; you did very wrong; and it is your own fault if this lady saw the villain who has wrought her ruin. This won't happen again; for I have both keys now, and I shall keep them, for I am afraid of you and Madame Larmor as well. Both of you are quite capable of yielding to Cadière's entreaties, and setting him at liberty."

"And if Madame de Marcenac came for the lady to-night, what shall I tell her?"

"Tell her all that has occurred here this evening, and beg her to wait until I can see her. I shall be here very early to-morrow morning; but if she prefers it, I will call on her to-morrow at twelve o'clock precisely, and then I shall probably have some good news to communicate. Now I will hear no more, and I have nothing more to say to you. Good-night. Light me out once more."

Poor Chardin could only obey, and he accompanied the two friends to the street-door. Although Sigoulès had left him in an exceedingly unpleasant position, he nevertheless experienced a feeling of relief when he once more saw the colonel walk away with Roger de Bussière.

They went as far as the Rue Saint Antoine without exchanging a single word; but there Sigoulès paused for a moment, and remarked to his companion: "You ask for no explanation, and I could not give one to you if you did. We must now part. Go wherever you like; but meet me to-morrow at sunrise at the Continental Hôtel, or rather wait for me under the arcade in the Rue de Castiglione. Don't fail to be there; you are the only person who can help me in this affair."

"I will be there," was Roger's prompt reply.

The colonel pressed his hand so tightly that he almost crushed it, and then walked rapidly away towards the Rue de Rivoli.

#### XIV.

PAUL DE LIZY returned home with anguish in his soul after his interview with Madame de Marcenac at Montmartre. He reproached himself bitterly for having resorted to this test, and realised now, when it was too late, that it had not dispelled the doubts which were torturing him.

The countess had not for a single instant departed from her haughty reserve, save when she had announced her fixed and irrevocable determination to sever the ties that bound her to her distrustful lover. She had even added some cruel words which amply avenged all she must have suffered; she had said to Paul, on leaving him: "I am going to rejoin my daughter."

This might be considered as equivalent to a confession, and yet Paul hesitated to regard it in that light. Something told him that it was only

an expression of defiance; that the countess had, in this way, burned her ships behind her, so as to prevent herself from reconsidering her decision, and renewing an engagement which the baron's suspicions had rendered an impossibility.

Paul had left her without trying to persuade her to relent. His pride revolted at the mere thought of saying to the woman he adored: "You declare that you are the mother of this child. I don't believe it. If this assertion were really true, you would endeavour to convince me to the contrary. You boast of a fault you never committed, and you break off your engagement so suddenly because you are innocent."

Instead of that, he had assumed an attitude of haughty indifference; but scarcely had he entered his brougham again to drive Sigoulès back to the hotel, than he repented of what he had done. He hoped that the colonel would advise him to return to Montmartre and throw himself at the feet of the countess. But Sigoulès, as already recorded, did not open his lips during the drive, and in fact the two friends separated without making any appointment to meet each other again.

Paul certainly divined that the colonel had various projects which he wished to carry into execution unaided; but as he had very little faith in their success, he felt no desire to know them. However, before returning home, he called at the club, to enter the colonel's name as a candidate for membership, and this accomplished, he locked himself up to brood over his misery undisturbed. His valet had received orders to tell any visitors that the baron was travelling, and Paul relied upon these instructions being obeyed. This man had been in his employ several years, and served him perfectly, because he thoroughly understood his master's character and habits. Although Paul had, of course, never made him a confidant, he, Dominique, as the valet was called, knew that his master was in love with the Countess de Marcenac. He was also partly aware of the strange events which had attended the baron's recent return from Monaco, for he had been with the door-keeper of the house when the baron came home early one morning, accompanied by a commissary of police. Dominique did not for a moment think of such a thing as questioning his master; but servants have a shrewdness, peculiar to themselves, and quick perception imparted by a careful observance of trifles. Thus, when Paul, on the day following his return from Monaco, gave Dominique twenty thousand francs to take to the Viscount de la Cadière, the valet understood perfectly well that his master had lost that amount at cards. Then he noted that a great change seemed to have come over the baron's spirits as well as over his habits. Scarcely back in Paris, he had driven to the Lyons railway station; and as Dominique heard the instructions given, it required no great amount of sagacity on his part to divine that his master was going to Fontainebleau. Now, Dominique perused the papers regularly, and knew all that they said about Basfroi's assassination; and from this assiduous perusal, he finally came to the conclusion that M. de Lizy must have some knowledge of the affair, and felt it his duty to impart this knowledge to the investigating magistrate. The next night the baron did not go to bed at all; but after returning home late in the evening he paced up and down his room until dawn, as Dominique, who slept on the floor below, could distinctly hear. Then on the morrow the baron went out again about noon, barely tasting his breakfast. He went, too, in his own brougham, which he very seldom ordered out at such an early hour, and Dominique, after a conference with the coachman, learnt that his master had gone first to the Continental

Hôtel, thence to the Place Pigalle, to return once more to the Continental, with a tall, stout man who had a decidedly military air. Shortly afterwards the baron had come back to his apartments on the Place de la Madeleine, and since then he had not once left his room.

Dominique was literally overcome with consternation. He had ceased to hope for his master's marriage with the countess, and now really began to fear that a terrible misfortune had befallen him, for the baron spent most of his time gesticulating wildly, and muttering incoherent words; and, worst of all, Dominique had actually seen him examining a revolver. "He is quite capable of killing himself," thought the old servant. "It would be a great pity, upon my word! He doesn't seem to care in the least what would become of me after his death; and yet it would be no easy matter for me to secure another place. Masters have their prejudices, and no one likes to hire a valet whose former master committed suicide. There ought to be some way to prevent such things. A man has no right to blow his brains out without providing for his servants beforehand."

Dominique was already wondering if it would not be advisable for him to go and warn the Countess de Marcenac; but he dared not leave the house without permission, not only for fear of being scolded, but, above all, because he was afraid to leave a man who was fingering fire-arms. While absorbed in these reflections, a violent peal of the bell summoned him to Paul's room.

"Go to the Lyons railway-station, "said his master," and engage a compartment in the night express for Nice."

"Is monsieur going back to Monaco?" exclaimed Dominique, in dismay.

"What business is that of yours?" asked Paul, harshly; "am I accountable to you for my actions, pray?"

"I trust Monsieur le Baron will excuse me," said Dominique, humbly; "I did not think of such a thing as questioning Monsieur le Baron, but I feel such an interest in his welfare."

"Go and do what I tell you."

"I will obey Monsieur le Baron, of course. If he blows his brains out after my departure, it will not be my fault; but I warn Monsieur le Baron that I shall inform Madame la Comtesse."

"The fellow must be mad!" muttered Paul.

"Indeed I'm not. For two days past, Monsieur le Baron has done nothing but examine his fire-arms, and I am not ignorant of the fact that Monsieur le Baron has great cause for anxiety."

"This is certainly the climax. I am curious to know where you have acquired so much valuable information."

"I read the papers monsieur takes. It is wrong, I know, but I don't read them until he has finished them, while the door-keeper doesn't hesitate about reading them before. The *Figaro* still publishes every morning a long article about the murder at Fontainebleau; it has even spoken of the unfortunate adventure which befel Monsieur le Baron upon his arrival in Paris. Besides, I was in the door keeper's room when monsieur returned home at seven o'clock in the morning, accompanied by a gentleman whom I recognised at once as a commissary of police."

Astonished by this unexpected display of shrewdness on the part of his valet, Paul forgot for a moment the offence of which he had been guilty, and began to question him upon the points which interested him the most. "What does the *Figaro* say about the crime?" he asked, brusquely.

"It says that the police are upon the murderer's track, and that the general opinion is, that a woman is mixed up in the affair."

"You have never heard anything of the kind!" thundered Paul, in a furious passion.

"I would not venture to concoct a story when Monsieur le Baron does me the honour to question me. The paper says that the old man who was murdered had an illegitimate child which he had brought up near Fontainebleau, and that he had bequeathed his entire fortune to the child's mother."

"This story is absurd. Basfroi was over seventy years old. But does the paper mention any names?"

"No, nor even give initials; but it says that the police went to the house to arrest the mother and daughter, and arrived too late. The house was empty; all its inmates had suddenly decamped. It is generally supposed that they came to Paris, and the police are looking for them there."

"So it is supposed that, in order to obtain possession of the property, the mother either murdered the old man or caused him to be murdered by some one else?"

"That is very natural, as Monsieur le Baron must admit."

Lizy made no reply, but began to tramp up and down the room, and his manner showed plainly enough that Dominique's account had made a deep impression upon him. He was saying to himself: "No; I won't go to Monaco without informing Bertha of what has occurred, and without denouncing that wretch La Cadière. She forbade me to interfere, but that is of little moment. I will save her in spite of herself." Then, turning to his valet, he cried: "Quick! bring me my coat, hat, and gloves. I'm going out."

"Am I to engage a compartment for monsieur?" inquired Dominique, gravely; though he was secretly exulting over the success of his stratagem.

"I will tell you when I return. What are you waiting for? Why don't you go and bring me what I ordered?"

"I only wished to call Monsieur le Baron's attention to the fact that some one rang just now. Ah! whoever it is, he is ringing again, and louder than before."

"Go and open the door, then," said Paul, with a gesture of impatience; "and when the visitor has given you his card, tell him that I can't see any one; if he insists upon coming in, shut the door in his face." Dominique hastened to obey. "It is Sigoulès, perhaps," soliloquised the baron, more disturbed than ever. "So much the worse for him, then. I won't see him. I am tired of hearing his arguments in Bertha's favour."

Just then the valet reappeared. "The visitor who wishes to see Monsieur le Baron is a young lady," he said, with an air of mystery; "and she brings a message from Madame de Marcenac."

"From Madame de Marcenac!" cried Paul, eagerly. "Show her in at once."

Dominique speedily returned, accompanied by the visitor whom Paul recognised at a glance as Martha Morgan, the countess's mysterious messenger. "You here!" he exclaimed, after he had dismissed his officious valet with an imperious gesture. "Yes, monsieur," replied the young girl, calmly, "and though you may be surprised to see me here, I am even more surprised at my coming."

"But you come at the request of Madame de Marcenac, I believe——"

"Not at all. Madame de Marcenac is quite ignorant of the step I have

taken; and had I told her of my intentions, she would have opposed them. I have only taken counsel of myself, and of my love for her."

This beginning made Paul distrustful. He began to suspect that his visitor was an ambassadress in disguise, and he instinctively felt that he must be on his guard. Nevertheless, he politely offered her a chair, seating himself in front of her, so that he could watch her face. She was still very beautiful, although her cheeks were much paler, and her eyes heavy and slightly sunken; the redness of their lids showed that she had been weeping.

"I need not tell you that my-name is Martha Morgan," she began, after a short pause, "You are aware of it since you witnessed the scene in the villa, at Fontainebleau. You had previously met me one night——"

"Met" is not the exact word. I saw you leave Madame de Marcenac's house by the gate opening upon the Avenue Gabriel."

"And you followed me—which amounts to the same thing. You had already begun to distrust Madame de Marcenac, and you wished to know where she was sending me. I can tell you now, I was the bearer of a letter which my benefactress did not wish to confide to the post, but which I was obliged to send in that way, so as to escape your curiosity. This letter was addressed to Jeanne Barbin, a very worthy woman, who takes charge of a child I teach, for teaching is my profession."

"I never doubted it," said Paul, with an ironical smile; "and I know that the child you speak of is the daughter of Madame de Marcenac."

"Then you know more than I do, for I have seen my pupil every day for four years; and I do not yet know the name of her mother."

Paul de Lizy did not expect this reply, it disconcerted him completely. He had expected to hear his visitor declare that the child was Madame Larmor's; and he was prepared to prove that the assertion was untrue. But instead of stoutly asserting that Madame Larmor was the mother, Martha Morgan admitted that there was a doubt, and this was sufficient proof that she had not been sent by the countess, for, in that case she would certainly have asserted the Countess de Marcenac's innocence.

"It seems very improbable, perhaps," she continued; "but such is really the case. And, to convince you that I am telling the truth, I must relate the history of my connection with Madame de Marcenac. I am her goddaughter. My mother died when I was ten years old, and my father, who was an old soldier, died six months afterwards, leaving me a mere pittance. Madame de Marcenac was but a few years older than myself, and she was at boarding-school when I became an orphan. I was brought up, however, at Monsieur Plantier's expense, and entered the same boarding-school where his daughter had been educated, just as she left it. Madame Larmor occasionally came to see the lady-principal, and it was thus I first became acquainted with her, though I knew her but very slightly, and soon lost sight of her altogether. It was my intention to become a teacher, and I had secured my diploma, but scarcely knew what to do with it, when, one day, Madame de Marcenac, who had never ceased to befriend me, came and told me that she had found a position for me. I was to undertake the education of a little girl five years old, who had neither father nor mother; at least, so the countess told me, adding that she took a deep interest in the child, who was named Bertha, after herself. You will readily believe that I did not hesitate to accept the position."

"Without making any further inquiry about the child's history and antecedents?"

"I thought she was an orphan, and Madame de Marcenac did not undeceive me. I was not eighteen; and there are secrets which a woman of delicacy does not confide to a girl of that age. I was surprised, however, that my pupil had no family name, but last year Madame de Marcenac told to me for the first time that there was a mystery connected with the child's parentage. I did not attempt to fathom it, but I imagined that little Bertha had been abandoned by her parents, who could not legally acknowledge her."

"Did you live with her at the villa in the Rue des Sorbiers?"

"No, sir; I spent my days there, but I hired a room of a forest keeper who was married and who had a house near the forest."

"And, Madame de Marcenac often came to see you at the villa, and Madame Larmor also, I believe?"

"Not at first. It was Madame de Marcenac who first brought her there. After that she came frequently, for several months; then her visits suddenly ceased, to be resumed again, after a long interval. Her visits have always been intermittent. She explained her absence by telling me that she was away a great deal, and I believed her; but I now think that it was her husband who travelled about so much."

"But at this villa you must have also seen the old man who has since been murdered?"

"Monsieur Basfroi? Certainly; he lived at the other end of the town, but he often came in our direction. I was always glad to see him, because he was the friend of Madame de Marcenac, and her father's former partner; but, unfortunately, little Bertha could not bear him, though she adores Madame de Marcenac. She is also very fond of Madame Larmor."

"Ah, mademoiselle, you won't succeed in making me believe that Madame de Marcenac has kept you in ignorance of the child's real parentage up to the present time."

"I have never ventured to question her. Why should she anticipate questions which I have never thought of putting to her?"

"But it is impossible that you should not have formed an opinion."

"I have certainly not formed a decided one, and until the scene I witnessed the other day, I did not even suspect that Bertha was the daughter of either of her benefactresses."

"But you then heard the countess confess to Monsieur Larmor that she was the mother; she even swore that such was the fact."

"Yes; and I am no more certain than I was before. It is certainly no great crime to perjure one's self to save a woman's life; and you know that Monsieur Larmor was going to kill his wife."

"And the countess has not enlightened you since that scene?"

"No, monsieur; she has left me free to think whatever I like. No doubt little Bertha believes that she is the real daughter of Madame de Marcenac; but that is no proof. She merely thinks so, because she has been told so by Madame de Marcenac."

"What object could the countess have had in saying that, if it were not true?"

"To avoid being obliged to answer troublesome questions. Little Bertha is very precocious."

"But she would not have been able to deceive the child. There is the infallible voice of instinct, you know."

"The voice of instinct is an invention of dramatists. Ever since little Bertha went to Fontainebleau to live she has been taught to call Madame

de Marcenac mamma ; Madame Larmor, aunt ; and me, cousin. She has obeyed these instructions ; but I am no more her cousin than Madame Larmor is her aunt. So it is quite possible that Madame de Marcenac is not her mother."

"But some one must know who her parents are. Perhaps Jeanne Barbin does."

"Jeanne Barbin knows no more about it than I do ; still, if you had not wounded Madame de Marcenac so deeply, I am certain that she would have told you all. But instead of doing that, you listened to all that has been said against her, and you have boasted of it in her presence. In such a case, any woman who possesses any delicacy or pride would avenge herself exactly as Madame de Marcenac did, by refusing to reply to such brutal accusations. She would be only too glad to forgive you, but she cannot do that now."

"Then what has brought you here, if everything is over between her and me ?" cried Paul.

"I have come to ask you not to prevent us from repairing the consequences of your imprudent conduct—to implore you not to interfere with our efforts to place Madame Larmor beyond the reach of her husband's vengeance."

"Oh, I am ready and willing to aid you in your efforts."

"That isn't necessary. Madame Larmor is safe for the present ; and I do not believe that you would try to ruin her. But you have a dangerous friend."

"Colonel Sigoulès ? Why, he is one of Madame de Marcenac's warmest defenders, and if it only depended upon him, the countess and myself would soon be reconciled."

"I know nothing about that ; but I do know that his imprudence has already cost my benefactress dear. So persuade him, if you possibly can, not to meddle any more with Madame de Marcenac's affairs. I don't ask him to assist her ; I only ask him to remain neutral ; and that certainly is not asking too much."

"I have not seen him since I went to Montmartre, and I don't know if I shall ever see him again. When you came in I was making arrangements to leave Paris for a long time ; but before doing so, I am anxious to warn the countess of the danger which threatens her, but I don't like to go to her house. So, mademoiselle, will you be kind enough to tell her that the police visited the villa in the Rue des Sorbiers yesterday to arrest the inmates of the house ? Strange rumours in connection with Basfroi's murder are rife at Fontainebleau. People even assert that he was the father of your pupil, and that he left his fortune to her in a roundabout way, by bequeathing it to Madame de Marcenac, her mother."

"That is an infamous falsehood !"

"I am satisfied of that ; but it would be as well for Madame de Marcenac to know what the public accuse her of. The papers are beginning to talk about it, and I advise her to put a stop to such rumours by going to the prefect of police, and naming the real culprit. Up to the present time she has shielded him, for reasons which I cannot explain ; but it is now time to act in the matter, and even at the risk of offending her still more deeply, I intend to denounce the assassin."

Martha Morgan had risen to her feet. She was very pale ; intense anger flashed from her eyes, and her bosom heaved with indignation.

"You will come with me to the residence of the Countess de Marcenac at once," she said, imperiously.

"What good would that do?" retorted Paul. "She will not receive me."

"If I take you there, she will receive you," was the girl's firm response.

"I doubt it very much, mademoiselle; besides, it isn't necessary for me to see her, as you can repeat to her all I have said."

"Come, I say, if you still feel any interest in a woman whom you have loved, and who still loves you."

"Did she tell you so?" exclaimed Paul, eagerly.

"No, sir; she told me that you had wronged her beyond all forgiveness, and that she did not consider you worthy of being her husband. But I know her; and I assure you that it only depends upon yourself to induce her to change a resolution which she made with deep regret. Come and see her, and acknowledge your offences."

"In other words, ask her pardon for having suspected her. You forget that I still don't know whether she is the mother of this child or not. You, yourself, who are in her confidence, don't know, and dare not express an opinion."

"I think that Bertha is the child of Madame Larmor, but that Madame de Marcenac will not admit it until her friend is perfectly safe from any possible violence on the part of her husband. That will soon happen now, for Madame Larmor will leave Paris perhaps this very night. Madame de Marcenac is making the necessary arrangements, and has provided her with a safe retreat in the meantime."

"And is the child also going to leave France?"

"No; she will remain where she is."

"Then how can you expect me to believe that Madame Larmor is her mother? A mother would not leave her daughter."

"Unless she was obliged to. I am not in the secret, but there is nothing to prove that the child will not rejoin Madame Larmor later on, when the situation becomes less complicated. Madame de Marcenac keeps the child here, perhaps, so as to be able to say to Monsieur Larmor: 'You must see that the child is mine, as I keep it.' And who knows but she will soon be willing to explain everything to you—as soon as she has nothing more to fear for her friend. You can certainly be patient until then; and you can take the first steps to adjust a misunderstanding which was undoubtedly due to your own conduct. Suppose you say to her: 'I regret that I was betrayed by jealous passion into doubting you; and I now return knowing that you would not take an unfair advantage of my confidence. Let us work together to repair the evil my imprudence has caused, and when that is accomplished, tell me all, but not until then. I will believe you; for you can then prove that you are telling me the truth without condemning your friend to almost certain death.'"

These words, uttered with persuasive warmth, went straight to Paul's heart. "So be it!" he said brusquely. "I will try, if you think that Madame de Marcenac will consent to see me."

"I can vouch for that; and you must go to her this very instant. I just left her, and I am sure that we shall find her at home if we start at once. Besides, if you deferred your visit, you might meet your friend Sigoulès, who would give you bad advice."

"On the contrary, he would support yours; but there are other reasons why I should prefer not to postpone the visit. I don't wish the countess to be summoned to the prefecture, and to save her from this annoyance I



am going to ask her permission to reveal the name of the culprit. Come, mademoiselle; I am ready to accompany you to the Faubourg Saint Honoré."

"And I am at your service," was the girl's laconic reply; and they at once set out for Madame de Marcenac's residence together.

## XV.

ON reaching the side-walk in front of the countess's house, on the spot where Paul had found the colonel a few evenings before, he now saw two mysterious individuals who evidently belonged to the detective service. "I did well to come," he thought; "the police are already watching the place." Martha rang. The door opened, and the porter manifested considerable surprise on perceiving the baron. He had evidently received orders not to admit M. de Lizy, but, intimidated no doubt by the presence of Mademoiselle Morgan, who was on intimate terms with his mistress, and who would not be likely to bring the gentleman there without the countess's permission, he did not venture to remonstrate. A similar scene occurred when they met the footman, whose duty it was to announce visitors; but this time Martha boldly took the initiative. "Where is Madame de Marcenac?" she asked.

"Madame has gone down into the garden," replied the servant.

"Very well, we will go there, too. It isn't necessary for you to inform her of our arrival." And without giving the servant a chance to make any objection, Martha dragged Lizy under the archway which connected the court-yard with the garden. Madame de Marcenac was returning indoors, after a long promenade, and on finding herself face to face with Paul, she started back in angry surprise. "You here, sir!" she exclaimed, with an ominous frown upon her usually smiling face. "Did not I request you never to set foot in my house again?"

"Godmother, it was I who went for Monsieur de Lizy and brought him here," hastily interrupted Martha Morgan.

"And what was your object, pray?" inquired the countess.

"Monsieur de Lizy will explain, godmother."

"You are probably ignorant of what has occurred, madame," began Paul. "But you must allow me to tell you that the investigating magistrate, accompanied by several policemen, has paid a visit to the villa in the Rue des Sorbiers, and examined it from top to bottom. He heard the rumours which are current in Fontainebleau, and the police know the name of the lady who last visited the child that resided there."

"I know it; I was summoned before the magistrate yesterday."

"Are you also aware that if you leave your house you will be followed? Do you know that detectives are lying in wait for you at your very door?"

"I was not aware of that; but I am not very much surprised to hear it. The magistrate gave me to understand that suspicion would be likely to fall upon me on account of the will which makes me Monsieur Basfrois's sole legatee. To-morrow, however, he will learn that Monsieur de la Cadière is the real assassin. You deemed proper to shield the wretch, but some one else will charge him with the crime, and furnish the necessary proofs of his guilt."

"But what if you are arrested in the meantime?"

"They will think twice before they arrest me; but if such a misfortune

happened, I could bear it, and I should impute it entirely to you. Yes, monsieur, to you, who, instead of telling the magistrate at Fontainebleau all you knew, protected the assassin by your silence ; to you, who merely thought of verifying the charges made against me by this criminal ; to you, who hid yourself in the villa in order to play the spy ! I am not afraid of the authorities ; they will soon find out that they made a mistake in arresting me ; but if my reputation is ruined, I shall have only you to thank for it !”

Paul was not prepared for this attack, but he tried to defend himself. “If I remained silent,” he said, in a voice husky with emotion, “it was only because I was afraid of compromising you, and because I did not want to see your name connected with a criminal suit. This man threatened to summon you as a witness in his behalf, and afterwards to throw the odium of the crime upon you.”

“But you have compromised me far more seriously by your subterfuges and suspicious manœuvring ; however, I might perhaps have forgiven you for that, if you had not imperiled the life of Madame Larmor. You have brought her husband’s wrath upon her.”

“It was not I who denounced her,” protested Paul.

“No ; it was not you who denounced her,” replied the countess, drily. “It was the scoundrel you dared not deliver up to justice. He was the writer of the anonymous letter which brought Monsieur Larmor to the villa on the day his wife went there. It was he who endeavoured to gain an entrance to her house at Bois-le-Roi, in order to establish an *alibi*.”

“Why does he hate her so bitterly ?” interrupted Paul.

Madame de Marcenac hesitated for an instant, and then urged on by indignation, she replied, with unusual animation :

“Because he was her lover many, many years ago ; because he took advantage of her weakness and inexperience ; because she dismissed him with scorn when she learned his true character ; because he has threatened her, and set a heavy price upon his silence for years ; and because, at last, weary of his demands, and encouraged by me, she refused to purchase his silence any longer. Are you satisfied now, sir ? You have extorted from me a secret I had resolved to keep. Now you are at liberty to try and finish your work. Fortunately, Gabrielle is in a place of safety. Her life will be exposed to no further peril, and as for her reputation, she has no longer any to lose.”

Paul de Lizy received these cutting words without wincing. He had learned from them an important fact. Madame Larmor had been La Cadrière’s mistress ; the countess formally admitted it, and as such was the case, as Madame Larmor had erred, little Bertha was no doubt her child. With this idea uppermost, Paul adjured Madame de Marcenac to complete her statement by proclaiming her own innocence. “Ah !” he exclaimed, eagerly, “you at last admit that you have sacrificed yourself for your friend ?”

“I said nothing of the kind,” replied the countess, quickly.

“No ; but I understand what you mean, and that is enough to make me entreat you to forgive me for my unjust suspicions. I love you too much. That is my only excuse.”

“An excuse which I cannot accept.”

“Ah, well ! punish me by imposing the severest penance upon me ; what can I do to atone for my folly ?”

“Nothing can atone for it, or repair its disastrous consequences. Think

whatever you please of me, and spare me the pain of driving you from my presence. I should have left Paris before now, if Gabrielle had not needed me."

"Then she is still in Paris?"

"She will no longer be there to-morrow; she goes away to-night."

"But if you are arrested to-day who will ensure her departure?"

The countess and Martha exchanged glances. The danger Paul had just mentioned was a grave one, and Madame de Marcenac felt its full weight. Not that she really feared that she would be arrested and sent to prison, but she might be summoned at any moment before the magistrate who had already questioned her; and to convince this magistrate that he made a mistake in suspecting her, it might become necessary for her to denounce La Cadière. And how could she do this without referring to the scoundrel's former relations with Madame Larmor, or at least, without mentioning her friend's name? A search would be immediately instituted for Madame Larmor; her husband would also be summoned to give his testimony; and in the meantime, the real culprit would have time to escape, even supposing that he were not already out of reach. A delay of twenty-four hours was imperative, for every arrangement had been made for the fugitive to leave Chardin's house that evening disguised as a servant, and take the midnight train for Havre, where a sailing-vessel, chartered by Madame de Marcenac, was in readiness to take her to England. The countess was to call for her friend herself, and Martha Morgan was to be one of the party; but this well-arranged plan had become impracticable, now that the house was under surveillance. If Madame de Marcenac went out the detectives would certainly follow her. They would see her enter Chardin's house, leave it in company with another woman, and repair to the Saint Lazare station. There her friend's journey would undoubtedly end, as the police would prevent her departure. The countess thought of all this, and she began to fear that without help she would not be able to extricate Madame Larmor from her dangerous position. "Will you entrust the task of saving your friend to me?" inquired Paul.

"I will accept no aid from you," Madame de Marcenac replied, brusquely.

"But you cannot go into the street. Your house is watched."

"Very well, then; I will not leave it."

"And Madame Larmor is to wait? But every moment that passes renders her situation more perilous. She must leave Paris at once, and leave it alone. You cannot go for her, nor can Mademoiselle Morgan go in your place, for it is known that she is devoted to you, and she would be followed as well. However, it is scarcely likely that there would be any such danger in my case."

"How do you know? You were seen to enter the house."

"But even if I were followed, there would be no disastrous consequence, for I mean to go straight to the prefecture of police. The detectives are not likely to follow me into the office of the commissary who examined me at the station."

"And what do you intend to say to this commissary?"

"I shall tell him that the traveller to whom I gave my ticket was Monsieur de la Cadière, and that he lives at the Continental Hôtel. I shall tell him nothing more. If he asks me why I waited so long before giving him this intelligence, I shall invent an explanation that will compromise no one, and the result will unquestionably be the immediate issue

of a warrant for La Cadière's arrest. Perhaps the scoundrel won't be discovered to-day, but the search will be continued; and in the meantime, the police will not trouble themselves any further about either of us. On leaving the prefecture, I shall go quietly to the club, where I may perhaps meet Colonel Sigoulès. I shall take him out for a walk on the boulevard, and dine with him at some popular restaurant. In a word, I shall manage to show myself for a few moments everywhere, even at a theatre, and the detectives are not likely to trouble themselves much about a man who evinces so little desire to conceal himself. But some time during the evening I will devise a means of warning Madame Larmor, and I assure you that I will get her safely out of the city." Then, seeing that the countess still hesitated, Paul continued: "What do you fear? You know that I hate La Cadière as much as I despise him. You also know that I care nothing for Monsieur Larmor, and that my feeling for his wife is one of sincere sympathy."

"Why shouldn't I doubt you?" interrupted Madame de Marcenac. "You certainly distrusted me."

"But I distrust you no longer," said Paul, eagerly, "and I will promise to ask Madame Larmor no questions if you will allow me to save her. I am sure she will tell me the truth without my asking it." The countess showed that she was touched; her features softened, and the frown faded from her brow. "Mademoiselle," resumed Paul, addressing Martha Morgan this time, "pray intercede for me. You came to my house, you found me in despair, you encouraged me by your advice, and it was yourself who decided me to come here. Don't desert me now. Induce Madame de Marcenac to put my devotion to the test. Don't let her deprive me of my last remaining hope of deserving the forgiveness I implore of her."

"Godmother," said Martha, "it seems to me that neither of us ought to risk a visit to Monsieur Chardin's house."

"Ah!" exclaimed Paul de Lizy, "so you took Madame Larmor to Chardin's house. She must not remain there a single day longer. Remember that Chardin is also one of Basfroi's legatees, and that the police must be watching him too. It is a wonder that Madame Larmor hasn't been discovered by the detectives before now. How long has she been there?"

"Only since yesterday," Madame de Marcenac at last decided to reply. "I took her there myself, and I don't think I was followed. I did not intend to leave her there long, but only this morning I received a telegram announcing that everything was ready for her embarkation at Havre. She will expect me to-night, so as to take the 12.15 train, and meantime my old friend Chardin must be upon hot coals."

"You have only to tell me where he lives," said Paul.

"No. 15 Rue des Lions Saint Paul," replied Martha, who was certainly taking M. de Lizy's part.

"Well," said Paul, "she must leave her retreat by eleven o'clock, and leave it alone. She must be informed that she is not to wait for you, and I alone can do that. I must go now."

"Wait at least until I can tell you what to do to induce Chardin to open his door," said Madame de Marcenac. Paul fell on his knees before her.

"Rise," said the countess, trying to withdraw her hand, which Paul had seized, and which he was covering with kisses.

But he held it fast, and, in a voice that went straight to Madame de

Marcenac's heart, he said, "Promise that you will forgive me if I save Madame Larmor!"

"Save her first," the countess answered, smiling; "and so that you may be able to render me that service, rise and listen to me."

The ice was broken, and Martha Morgan, who had helped not a little in bringing about this change, heartily congratulated herself upon her work. "To induce Chardin to admit you," continued the countess, "you must ring three times in quick succession; moreover, when he sees you, he will perhaps object to letting you in. But you must tell him that you come at my request, and show him this letter which I have written, and which I intended to give to Gabrielle myself. It contains all the instructions she will need about embarking. Chardin will recognise my handwriting. But don't forget to tell him," the countess added, "that our late differences have been adjusted." She had just recollected that she had informed Chardin of the breaking off of her engagement with the baron.

"What!" exclaimed Paul; "he knows——"

"That I have had cause to complain of you? Yes; I was obliged to tell him that. But he defended you very warmly, and he will be glad to see that you are restored to favour. You will then ask him to take you into the presence of Madame Larmor. She only knows you by name, but you must tell her what has been agreed upon between us. I will give you a sum of money to supply her most urgent wants. The poor woman was obliged to fly in such haste that she came to my house penniless."

"That isn't necessary. I have ten thousand francs about me, and if that is enough——"

"It is more than enough. I will refund it to you to-morrow. Now go, and be prudent. I hold you responsible for Madame Larmor's safe departure."

"I accept the responsibility, and I shall go straight from here to the prefecture. One question more. What has the husband been doing since his wife disappeared?"

"He has been looking for her, and for La Cadière. He came here yesterday, and demanded to see Gabrielle. Fortunately she was already safe in Chardin's house, and his visit proved that he did not know where she had taken refuge. So we have nothing to fear from him, even if you should by some unlucky chance happen to meet him. Besides, he wouldn't know you, as he has never seen you. Now, one last bit of advice. Not a word to your friend the colonel."

"I have heard nothing from him since he accompanied me to Montmartre, and I shan't go in search of him; but he will give us no trouble, for he is sincerely devoted to you."

"I am pleased to hear it; but I fear that he is inclined to be imprudent, and I beg you to act alone. So pray avoid him. That is all I ask. By which way do you propose leaving the house?"

"By the Champs Elysées, as we are in the garden. It will be the shortest way; besides, it will enable me to see if your house is watched from all sides. If I see no suspicious persons hanging about when I open the gate, I will return to tell you that the coast is clear. If, on the contrary, I see any detectives prowling around, I will close the gate immediately. This will mean that I shall be followed."

"And that Martha and myself would meet with a similar fate; but we

shan't venture out. Well, call again to-morrow. I shall await your report with the greatest impatience."

Paul understood that he must rest content with a promise of forgiveness. So he imprinted a respectful kiss upon the hand that Madame de Marcenac extended to him, bestowed a grateful glance on Martha, and hastened to the gate. Before reaching it he drew a cigar and a match-box from his pocket, and, after opening the gate, stopped for a moment to light his cigar, pretending to bestow upon the operation all the attention customary with real lovers of the weed, but in reality glancing hastily around him. There was no one in the Avenue Gabriel, but at about thirty yards from the railing that enclosed the grounds two respectably dressed men who were talking, or pretending to talk, stood looking towards the house. Paul was satisfied. He shut the gate without even turning to look back, and strolled carelessly along towards the Place de la Concorde. There was a cab-stand at the corner of the avenue, and he at first thought of taking a cab, but afterwards changed his mind.

One of the men who had been lounging in front of the house quietly followed him, while the other remained under the trees. Paul had suspected that orders had been given to follow every individual who left the house, and he now had an opportunity of satisfying himself that his suspicions were correct. After strolling leisurely across the Place de la Concorde, he entered the Tuileries garden, taking care to pause occasionally like a man who has hardly made up his mind where he wishes to go. The detective, who knew his business, imitated this manoeuvre, and kept his distance. At last the baron took the path that skirts the terrace, while the detective followed the main walk, for he had good eyesight, and was not afraid of losing his man in this garden, enclosed on every side. On reaching the bridge a new plan occurred to Paul, and instead of following the quays for the rest of the way, he descended to the bank of the river and went on board one of the penny steamers. As he expected, the man descended to the quay, and came on board the same boat; they went up the Seine together, and left the steamer together at the Pont Neuf landing stage. "He must begin to wonder where I am going," thought Lizy. "I will have a good laugh at his expense presently."

On reaching the Quai de la Megisserie, he retraced his steps for a short distance, and crossed the bridge below, pausing on the abutment at the further end. The detective slowly approached, but not wishing to come too near, he crossed over to the other side of the bridge, and began to look down at the river and at the laundry-boats moored below. Paul, however, went straight up to him, and touching his hat, politely asked: "Excuse me, sir, but can you tell me on which side I shall find the entrance to the prefecture of police?"

The man was so little prepared for such a question that he lost his presence of mind entirely. "I cannot tell you exactly," he stammered. "It has just been rebuilt; in fact, everything here is so greatly changed that I scarcely know where I am."

"I have business with one of the commissaries of police."

"In that case, you had better take the Quai de l'Horloge. You will probably find an entrance on that side; but as far as the exact door——"

"Thanks, sir, the information you have so kindly given me will suffice."

The farce was played, and the detective was left a prey to still greater perplexity. It was the first time it had ever been his fate to follow a man who was going before a magistrate of his own accord, and he did not feel

quite certain whether he ought to follow him into the prefecture or not. He finally decided to follow him at a distance, however; and at last saw him enter the prefecture after a short conversation with the soldier on guard. Paul, who was watching him out of the corner of his eye, chuckled audibly and said to himself: "I think the poor devil won't try that over again. I am going to tell the magistrate about it, and request him not only to moderate the zeal of his subordinates but to rid me entirely of this simpleton."

Paul crossed a court-yard in which several policemen were walking to and fro, and after making the necessary inquiries, he reached a large waiting-room where he found a clerk to whom he entrusted his card. He was not compelled to wait. Only a moment afterwards the clerk returned and conducted him into the office of the magistrate, who pointed to a chair, and said: "How do you do, sir? I was almost expecting you, and if you had not come, I should have sent for you."

"May I ask you why?" inquired Paul, considerably surprised.

"I see no impropriety in telling you. There are some new features in the Basfroi case. The old man had a mistress and an illegitimate child, which he was bringing up in a small house on the outskirts of the forest. Several of my subordinates paid a visit to the house, but they found no one there. The inhabitants had fled. We have instituted a search for them, and have ascertained beyond a doubt that Madame de Marcenac is acquainted with them although she denies it. I questioned her yesterday."

"I am aware of that. I just left her house. She says that she cannot understand why any one should suspect her."

"It is very natural under the circumstances. Basfroi's will made her the only person interested in the poor man's death. Still we have no idea of arresting the lady at present. We shall confine ourselves to watching her."

"And very closely, it seems to me. Her house is surrounded by detectives, and one of them thought proper to follow me to the very door of the prefecture. Am I also suspected of complicity in the crime?"

"Certainly not; but the detectives have orders to follow any one whom they may see leaving the house. It is a precautionary measure which will be observed until we have found the man who travelled with you from Melun to Paris."

"I came here to tell you that I know who he is, and where he may be found."

"Ah!" said the magistrate, looking searchingly at the baron; "that's strange! Why have you waited so long?"

"Because it was only yesterday that I made the discovery. I am a member of several clubs—among others, of one known as the Concord Club—"

"A regular gambling-den, where sharpers thrive; and you frequent such a place as that!"

"I must admit that I am ashamed of it; but, unfortunately, I like an exciting game, and the stakes there are always very high. I spent some hours there playing baccarat a couple of nights ago, and lost a large amount of money to a man whom I had no recollection of ever having seen before; but as I was about to leave he took me aside to thank me for the service I had rendered him by selling him my ticket in the railway train."

"What! did he do this entirely of his own accord?"

"Oh! he didn't confess that he had assassinated Basfroi. He even pretended that he could prove an *alibi* if he were accused of the crime, and repeated the story he had told me in the train of how he had been discovered at a château near Melun, and compelled to fly for his life. He calls himself the Viscount de la Cadière, but I am satisfied that neither the title nor the name belong to him."

The magistrate wrote a brief note, rang his bell, and entrusted the note to the clerk that answered the summons. "We shall soon know something more about this individual," he remarked.

"At the club," resumed Paul, "he is looked upon as a professional gambler, having no other apparent means of support. Moreover, he has long been acquainted with Basfroi, who lent him money at a heavy rate of interest."

"These facts are certainly significant; but why should such a man have volunteered this compromising information when you did not recognise him? a fact which surprises me considerably."

"You forget that it was dark when he entered the compartment, and that he wore a false beard and blue spectacles. He even disguised his voice."

"Then the man must be insane. What! he knew that you didn't recognise him, and yet he told you that he was the mysterious stranger?"

"I was as much surprised as you, for I did not understand his motive until afterwards. There had been a good deal of talk at the club about the murder at Fontainebleau. Many of the gentlemen present were, or had been, in Basfroi's debt. They were laughingly warned that they would be accused of having murdered him to escape paying their debts. One fellow, named Dauzance, went even further, and reminded La Cadière of his frequent visits to Fontainebleau, and La Cadière, who had made light of the matter at first, at last began to grow uncomfortable. It was then that he took this bold step to speak to me so that he might be able to say, in case he was accused: 'I have never made any attempt to conceal the fact that I purchased the Baron de Lizy's ticket, for I myself told him of my own accord that I was his travelling-companion.'"

"This is all very plausible; but what guarantee had he that you wouldn't go straight to an investigating magistrate with this strange disclosure? It was your duty to do so, and he knew it."

"And consequently took his precautions. He knew that I expected to marry the Countess de Marcenac, and that Madame de Marcenac often visited Basfroi, so he gave me to understand that if I denounced him, he would accuse her of having instigated the murder, in order to come into possession of the usurer's property. I confess that I hesitated. I wished to consult Madame de Marcenac before taking any action in the matter, and it was she herself who advised me to call on you without further delay. She has no reason to dread this scoundrel's calumnies, as the evidence cannot fail to establish her entire innocence. I am as sure of it as I am of the fact that Madame de Marcenac will soon be my wife."

Just then the clerk returned, bringing an answer to the note, and withdrew after handing it to the official, who, after reading it carefully, remarked: "The information is of the most unfavourable character. The pretended viscount's real name is simply Gonfaron. He was a foundling, reared by charity at a Jesuit school, from which he made his escape to rove about the world. After several voyages to the West Indies and Hindostan, he returned to Marseilles, where he engaged in several swindling



operations. He was, in one case, sentenced to six months' imprisonment. He did not serve his term, however, but made his escape to some foreign land, where he remained for several years. His offence was outlawed when he returned to Paris; and the only charge that can now be made against him is that he makes his living by gambling."

"And do you think that a man with such antecedents is not capable of robbery and assassination?" exclaimed Paul, triumphantly.

"I think he is quite capable of it, and I shall at once have him arrested. But tell me, did he suspect that you intended to denounce him?"

"I think not. I fancy he will be at the club this evening, as usual. He lives, I believe, at the Continental Hôtel, that is, unless he moved within the past forty-eight hours, which is quite possible, as he spoke the other day of having purchased some furniture for a suite of rooms he had rented near the Champs Elysées."

"Then there will be no difficulty about making the arrest. I will send two of my best men in search of him. The investigating magistrate at Fontainebleau will be at once apprised of all this by telegraph. Monsieur de la Cadière will be in prison before night. But I warn you, sir, that you will be obliged to meet him, and the Countess de Marcenac will also be summoned as a witness, and will be expected to give her testimony in the prisoner's presence."

"That is exactly what she wishes to do."

"Very well, sir; I congratulate you upon your sensible resolution, though it was come to rather late in the day, and I will detain you no longer."

Lizy thereupon retired. He was not at all pleased with the magistrate's manner; and he saw that the functionary did not consider the affair ended by any means, so far as he, Paul, was concerned. Nor did the position of the countess seem any more satisfactory; but although Paul was fully aware of this fact, he could do nothing more.

## XVI.

THE baron left the prefecture by the same door as he had entered, but when he stepped out upon the Quai de l'Horloge, the detective who had followed him to the building was nowhere to be seen. Paul was certainly not sorry to be freed from this espionage, but he felt inclined to distrust the police, and it was only after due consideration that he decided to walk off. He was not without a fear that the detective who had been dogging his steps had resigned his task to some other official before going away. The first thing to be done was to satisfy himself on this point, and to do so, he began walking up and down the Quai de l'Horloge, pausing from time to time, and even leaning over the parapet to contemplate the ever-changing panorama on the river below, and then walking back again, furtively examining every person that he met. Reassured by his tour of inspection, Paul finally decided to cross the river, which he did very leisurely, and not without looking back several times to see if any one was following him. He had the satisfaction of seeing that no one was dogging his steps; so there was nothing to prevent him from going straight to the Rue des Lions Saint Paul. However, as an additional precaution, he decided to make a long detour. He had plenty of time to fulfill the mission that Madame de Marcenac had entrusted to him, for it was only two o'clock,

and Madame Larmor could not leave Chardin's house until nearly midnight; so it would be better for him not to go there until the evening, as he would then be less likely to attract the attention of the neighbours.

Springing into a cab Paul thereupon ordered the driver to take him to his club. He had just reached his destination, and was engaged in paying the cabman, when he was accosted by Dauzance, whom one met everywhere, especially when one did not wish to see him. "Well, my dear baron, have you heard the news?" cried Alfred breathlessly. "The illustrious Viscount de la Cadière has disappeared."

"Indeed!" said Paul, trying to assume an air of indifference.

"A Spaniard won from him every cent he possessed on the night before last, and where he got the immense amount he lost I cannot imagine. But that is not the question. Yesterday he borrowed fifty thousand francs from Auguste, our croupier, and he has not turned up since."

"And you conclude from this that he will never return?"

"Yes; and I will tell you my reasons. He had made an engagement with the Spaniard, who promised him his revenge. La Cadière never fails to keep such an appointment when he has any money, and he had money; for, even after his account was settled, there would still be a balance of at least thirty thousand francs, considerably more than he would have needed to break the bank, for he has never been known to lose two nights in succession."

"Something, perhaps, prevented him from keeping his engagement."

"Auguste thought so, too, at first. He had lent La Cadière fifty thousand francs, and the viscount had promised him half of his winnings, so Auguste started out in pursuit of him without any loss of time. I just saw him. He is tearing his hair, and talks of bringing a suit against the scoundrel who has deceived him. The poor devil spent the whole morning in hunting for the viscount, and as he hasn't succeeded in finding him he can't be in Paris, for Auguste is well acquainted with his client's habits and his different residences."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the baron. "Has he several abodes?"

"He resides ostensibly at the Continental Hôtel, but for several months he has been talking of a magnificent suite of apartments which he was having prepared in the Avenue Marceau, but no one at the club believed a word of it. The fact is, La Cadière lived upon what he won from day to day, and was frequently without a penny in his pocket. This state of affairs, of course, could not go on indefinitely; the end had to come sooner or later, and the only wonder is that he managed to hold out as long as he did. And yet I think he will eventually get out of this scrape, just as he has got out of so many others, for he always manages to fall upon his feet. If he has really gone for good, it must be that your friend the colonel has frightened him away. He called yesterday to inquire if he had been elected a member. I happened to be here, and so I told him all about it, but I could see very plainly that there was something he was anxious to find out about La Cadière. He questioned me about him, and I told him all I knew about this mysterious personage; and added that La Cadière was then talking with Auguste in the billiard room. I left immediately afterwards, but I returned at seven o'clock for dinner, and Auguste, who had already become uneasy, informed me that, after my departure, the colonel and La Cadière had had a stormy conversation in the grand drawing-room. Auguste was in the adjoining room, and saw them through the

glass door. He says that they gesticulated violently, and parted in evident anger. The viscount left first, and the colonel followed him almost immediately. I conclude that the colonel threatened him with exposure, and so does Auguste."

"Exposure for what?"

"The murder at Fontainebleau. Oh! he isn't accused openly, and up to the present time, the authorities seem to have paid no attention to him. But you may recollect what I told you the other day about his connection with Basfroi. He often borrowed money of him, and I am almost sure that he was heavily in the usurer's debt when the latter died. Now, the assassin appropriated all the notes that were in the safe, although he took good care to leave a will which bequeathes Basfroi's entire property to—to a person you know very well."

"You refer to Madame de Marcenac, I suppose?" said Paul, drily.

"I shouldn't have ventured to mention her name in your presence," replied Dauzance, "but as you have heard about the will, I may as well tell you that I believe it was La Cadière who committed the murder. You probably know that he was once the favourite companion of the Count de Marcenac, but that he afterwards quarrelled with him. The countess began the trouble, I believe, by closing her doors against this sharper, who was systematically defrauding her husband. La Cadière has never forgiven her for this affront, and in revenge he has now tried to cast suspicion upon her."

"Then is this story known here, and are the members talking about the countess?"

"Oh! very little; and no one believes her guilty. On the contrary, many think, with me, that the viscount undoubtedly murdered the usurer."

"And yet they allowed him to play baccarat with them, as if the murder was a matter of no consequence; and no one thinks of denouncing him!"

"Well, none of us are certain, after all, and so far as I myself am concerned, I feel inclined to let La Cadière go and get hanged elsewhere, rather than cause a scandal which would certainly lead to the breaking up of the club. Moreover, I have an idea that your friend, the colonel, gave the viscount a chance to get off quietly, and that the rascal was wise enough to avail himself of it by accepting the colonel's terms. I mean that he probably ordered him to leave Paris immediately under the penalty of denouncing him to the authorities; and so, if La Cadière does not reappear, it will be because he has obeyed the injunction. Poor Auguste thinks so, and he is cursing Colonel Sigoulès with his whole heart. He could easily forgive the viscount for murdering Basfroi; but he can't forgive him for running off with his fifty thousand francs."

"I am greatly obliged to you for your information," said Paul, in order to put an end to the interview.

"Delighted to have been able to gratify your curiosity, I am sure, drawled Dauzance. And he sauntered away, after bestowing upon the baron a cordial hand-shake, with which the latter would have gladly dispensed.

Paul was greatly perplexed; but he had lost all desire to enter the club-house where he would probably be obliged to listen to the disclosures and lamentations of the croupier, and where the detectives might at any moment arrive to arrest M. de la Cadière. He had just decided to repair on foot to the Marais, where M. Chardin resided, when a hand was

heavily laid upon his shoulder, and, turning round, he found himself face to face with Sigoulès, who exclaimed: "I have found you at last! I just called at your house, where I left word for you to meet me at four o'clock on the Place de la Bastille."

Lizy thought his friend must have lost his senses. "What for?" he asked, coldly.

"I will tell you when I meet you there."

"No; for I shan't go. I have business to attend to elsewhere."

"You have no business as urgent and important as that which I will explain to you when the right moment comes."

"I shan't keep the appointment. I feel sure, however, that you are meddling with matters that don't concern you. What is this I hear about the scene you had at the club yesterday with that wretch, La Cadière?"

"So you have heard that I met him?"

"Yes; Dauzance, who just left me, told me all about it. And are you aware that all the members of the club know what you said to the rascal? A croupier who had just lent La Cadière money was watching you; and as La Cadière has not been seen since the interview——"

"No; I don't suppose he has been seen since," responded the colonel, with a grim smile, the meaning of which Paul failed to understand.

"It is supposed that he has left Paris," continued the baron, "and that you are the cause of his departure; in short, that you have frightened him off. The result of this brilliant achievement on your part will be his escape from the police who are looking for him, for I have denounced him."

"The deuce! This is news, indeed. What induced you to take such a step?"

"I did it at the request of Madame de Marcenac."

"The countess? You have seen her? Then you are reconciled?"

"What difference does that make to you?"

"It makes a great deal of difference to me, and I should be rejoiced to hear of it, for I have been working to bring about a reconciliation between you ever since I saw you last."

"And you have succeeded in placing the countess in a most dangerous position. Do you not know that she is suspected of the murder, and that she was examined yesterday by the investigating magistrate? If the capture of La Cadière is not effected, how will she vindicate herself?"

"I really can't say," replied the colonel, laconically. "However, I consider that my conduct has been exactly what it ought to have been. In an hour or two, you will thank me for what I have done."

"I don't think so. But tell me, what necessity was there for an interview with La Cadière? You should, at least, have consulted me first."

"I should have done so if I had seen you."

"There was nothing to prevent you from coming to see me."

"Excuse me; you forget the circumstances under which we parted. After the scene in the garden at Montmartre, I said all I could say to induce you not to break off your engagement; but you replied that the countess had defied you, and that you would never forgive her. Still I felt sure that this was only a lover's tiff, and I was right, it seems, as you have already seen Madame de Marcenac again. However, I know you so well that I thought it best to give your anger time to cool, so I did not insist, but merely said to you: 'Will you allow me to take such measures as I may see fit to arrange matters?' And you replied: 'Do whatever you please, only refrain from ever mentioning her name to me again'."

"I don't deny it, but——"

"Well, I, whom you accused just now of wishing to give you orders, have only executed yours to the very letter. I formed a plan which I took good care not to communicate to you, and for fear that I should be led into speaking of the countess, I avoided going to your house."

"This plan probably consisted in picking a quarrel with La Cadière—in threatening him with your big sabre! You see no other way of solving difficulties."

"Yes, I do; as I will prove to you before to-night. I have done exactly what I said I should do, and you have done exactly what you said you shouldn't; for you swore that you were not going to trouble yourself any further about Madame de Marcenac's affairs, and yet you have just been to see a commissary of police on her behalf. You reproach me for having frightened La Cadière away. I might, with reason, reproach you for having set the police upon this scoundrel's track without first warning me. You accuse me of disarranging your plans; you have also disarranged mine. But we have no time to lose, and I beg that you will do what I ask. It is not at all difficult, and if you will consent to meet me on the Place de la Bastille at four o'clock precisely—it is now a quarter to three——"

"And do you suppose I shall go there unless you first tell me what your object is?"

"If you consent to keep this appointment, I will then explain to you why I need your aid."

"Why not now?"

"Because it would be premature. The plan I have made may fail. I shall know in an hour's time."

"I don't understand your reasons."

"You will soon. What risk do you run in going there? If you don't approve of my scheme, you will be at liberty to refuse your assistance."

"And if I should refuse it, do you intend to proceed without it?"

"I shall be obliged to do so, though I shan't have an equally good chance of success." Then, seeing that Paul still seemed undecided, the colonel added, earnestly: "My dear friend, I give you my word of honour that I have carefully considered matters before deciding upon my plan, which is the only one, so it seems to me, that can extricate us all from a most unpleasant predicament, and especially poor Madame Larmor. I know very well that her husband is searching for her in order to kill her; and if he found her, he would show her no mercy; so he must not find her."

Paul also hoped to accomplish the same work, but he did not wish to associate Sigoules in the task that Madame de Marcenac had just entrusted to him, and he wondered if there would be time enough left to perform it after keeping the appointment upon which the colonel insisted so strongly. "How much time will this mysterious expedition of yours require?" he asked, brusquely.

"An hour; possibly an hour and a half, but no longer."

"And afterwards I shall be at liberty to go where I like, without being followed, or without any one trying to find out where I am going?"

"I can safely promise you that."

Paul thereupon said to himself: "I shall be at liberty, then, by half-past five at the very latest. That will be a good hour for me to present myself at Chardin's, and to give Madame Larmor Bertha's letter and the

money for her travelling expenses," and he added aloud: "Very well; so be it! I consent to try the experiment."

"Thanks, old fellow!" exclaimed the colonel, almost crushing his friend's hand in the fulness of his gratitude. "I assure you that you won't repent of this confidence in me." And after again shaking hands with Paul, he hastened towards the Madeleine.

## XVII.

SIGOULÈS had accomplished a good deal since parting from his old comrade Roger. The night before, taking a cab, he had driven straight to the Continental Hôtel, where a first disappointment awaited him, for he had relied upon finding M. Larmor there, and M. Larmor was absent. At the hotel office Sigoulès learned that the engineer had left for Bois-le-Roi that same evening, but that he had retained his rooms, and would return at noon the following day. It was a very vexatious delay, but he submitted to it, for M. Larmor was to play the leading part in his daring scheme, and it was impossible to do without him. Making an appointment at the hotel at noon, the colonel went off resolving to employ his time as agreeably as possible until then. On the boulevard he met some officers belonging to his own regiment, who had just arrived from Tunis, and who insisted that he should accompany them to a café, where they finished the evening emptying bowls of punch, and spinning military yarns. Sigoulès, who only wanted to kill time until the morrow, proved a willing captive, and it was two o'clock in the morning when he returned to the Continental. It was scarcely worth while going to bed, as he had made an appointment to meet Roger at daybreak, under the arcade on the Rue de Castiglione; so he threw himself on a sofa, after smoking several cigars, and was soon sound asleep. He woke promptly at five o'clock, took a bath, and dressed with as much care as if he intended to call on the countess, after which he went down-stairs into the street, to the great astonishment of the door-keeper, who was not in the habit of seeing people leave the hotel at sunrise. Roger was already at his post under the arcade. "Here you are, obedient to orders!" said the colonel, on seeing him.

"And ready to march!" replied Roger.

"Well said, old fellow! but at this moment the general has no orders to give. The signal for attack won't be given till this afternoon, so you have plenty of time to put yourself in battle array. I know that you have no clothes except those you are wearing; and I also know that a tailor can't furnish you with a suit in a single morning; but there are outfitting establishments where you can procure all that is necessary—the Belle Jardinière, for instance."

"I'll go there; but where shall I meet you again?"

"Let us go together; it will be the best plan."

"But I'm afraid that establishment is not yet open."

"True; but it will be at nine o'clock. At ten, I'll meet you here, and we can breakfast together. At noon, I shall leave you for three-quarters of an hour or so, and afterwards, if things turn out as I hope, we will march to the attack. And now I think of it, do me the favour to purchase two good swords. You can select them as well, or even better than I can."

When Sigoulès returned to the spot, punctually at ten o'clock, he found Roger, dressed in black from head to foot, and standing near a cab.

"You remembered to buy a new ribbon," said the colonel, as he surveyed his friend carefully. "I'm glad of it. And the swords?"

"They are in the cab. Would you like to examine them?"

"It isn't necessary. I have great confidence in your judgment in such matters. Let us go to breakfast now." Roger was nothing loath; so Sigoulès escorted him to the dining-room, leaving him there alone for a moment while he went to request the hotel clerk to warn him as soon as M. Larmor returned; after which he ordered a hearty breakfast. The colonel did not lose sight of the clock, however, and at half-past eleven they were ready to leave the table, whereupon Sigoulès proposed that they should take their coffee under the gallery around the courtyard of the hotel. They had scarcely seated themselves, and lighted their cigars, when the colonel saw M. Larmor in the vestibule talking impatiently with a servant, as if he were anxious to go up to his own room. "There is my man," said Sigoulès to Roger, "and it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to him immediately. Remain here and sip your coffee, and after I have talked with him I will tell you the result of our conversation, and explain what I wish you to do."

"I won't move," replied the ex-quartermaster.

M. Larmor now crossed the courtyard; Sigoulès followed, ascended the stairs behind him, and overtook him at the door of his room on the third floor of the hotel. M. Larmor now turned and curtly asked: "Was it you who told the clerk to inform you as soon as I came in?"

"Yes, sir," replied the colonel, bowing politely. "Do you not recognise me?"

"Ah! yes. What do you wish to say to me?"

"Something that I cannot say to you here in the passage."

"Very well; come in, then. But pray be brief, I have very little time at my disposal."

They then entered a room in which there were a number of trunks, several of which evidently belonged to a lady. Madame Larmor must certainly have fled precipitately. "Now speak, sir," said the husband, without offering the colonel a chair. "Have you come on behalf of the scoundrel who fled like a coward after grossly insulting me?"

"Not on his behalf, though I wish to speak to you about him. Permit me, first of all, to briefly remind you of the facts. By an unfortunate chance I witnessed a quarrel between you and this individual; and at one moment you seemed inclined to hold me responsible for his outrageous conduct. I told you his name, and told you that he resided here in the hotel. At that time I could tell you nothing more."

"So I did not insist. But you probably wonder why I have not punished the scoundrel as he deserves——"

"Not at all, for I know why. La Cadière has left the hotel, and you have not been able to find him. But he is still in Paris, and knowing that you are looking for him, he is trying to conceal himself. I know what he is. I have a thorough knowledge of his habits and antecedents, and for this reason I have espoused your cause and declared war to the death against him."

"I thank you; but I alone have been insulted, so it is for me alone to avenge myself. Bring me face to face with him, if you can. He has brought dishonour upon me; he has destroyed my happiness. I shall fight him and kill him, even if you told me that he had just come from the galaxies."

"He has never been there yet; but he is in a fair way to get there. The pretended Viscount de la Cadière is an adventurer of the lowest kind, as well as a thief and a murderer. It was he who strangled that usurer at Fontainebleau the other night."

"The night my keeper saw him at Bois-le-Roi," said M. Larmor, bitterly.

"He allowed himself to be seen there for the express purpose of preparing an *alibi*; and if I dared, I should venture to add that he has basely slandered an innocent woman. But pray tell me, would you fight with a man who is likely to be arrested as a criminal at any moment?"

"I should not hesitate for an instant; I thirst for his blood; but this duel is unfortunately impossible. In the first place, I cannot compel him to fight; besides, where can he obtain seconds? And if he is hiding, as you said just now, how can he be induced to show himself on the field of honour?"

"It is true that a duel might be interrupted by the arrival of the gendarmes. But I have thought of that."

"What do you propose to me, then?"

"A hostile encounter may take place elsewhere than in the woods of Vincennes or Meudon. In a garden, for instance. However, there are grave objections to a duel fought under such circumstances. The authorities would hardly show much mercy to the combatants and their seconds."

"I am willing to run any risk; but these are mere suppositions. It is hardly in your power to compel Monsieur de la Cadière to place himself within reach of my sword."

"Perhaps it is," said the colonel, after a pause. "I must begin by confessing that I did not have you in my mind when I opened my campaign against this scoundrel. I despised and hated him; but I should have allowed him to go and get hanged elsewhere if he had not molested persons in whom I take an interest. He has not only circulated the most abominable slanders about the Countess de Marcenac, whom one of my best friends intends to marry, but he has had the audacity to threaten her, and to accuse her of having instigated the murder of the usurer who bequeathed her his entire fortune. Moreover, last night he broke into the house of Monsieur Chardin, a very worthy man, and endeavoured to take from him by force some papers which Basfroi had entrusted to him—papers which prove beyond any possible doubt that La Cadière is the Fontainebleau assassin. However, I suspected his plans, and followed him, arriving just in time to prevent him from committing another murder. I took with me one of my former comrades, a strong, determined, cautious fellow, with whose help I succeeded in securing La Cadière, and in locking him up in the cellar of Chardin's house, where he still remains. At first, I thought of going straight to the prefect of police, telling him what I had done, and delivering up my prisoner; then I remembered that the scoundrel belonged to you, and that I had no right to put him beyond the reach of your vengeance without consulting you, and allowing you an opportunity to punish him yourself. But I have no desire to influence you in your decision. Weigh the pros and cons carefully, and whatever your determination may be, count upon me. I would not speak in this way to any one else, sir; for the majority of men would probably be indignant at such language; but I think that I understand you, that you have a heart above certain prevailing prejudices, and that you understand the motive that prompts me."

"You speak like a soldier," replied M. Larmor; "and we understand each other. I don't wish the police to interfere in my domestic affairs."



The task of killing this man devolves upon me, and I shall kill him, never fear ! ”

“ I should do the same if I were in your place,” said Sigoulès, quietly. “ Still, it is my duty to remind you that you will require honourable seconds.”

“ You shall act as mine.”

“ Willingly ; but who is to assist your opponent ? We cannot take one of the friends of such a wretch. I certainly have at my disposal the friend I spoke of just now—the one who assisted me in capturing the villain ; but La Cadière may object to him on that account.”

“ No doubt he will do so, and I think it would be better not to give him any excuse for refusing. I have a friend, an old school friend, who understands my position, and who is placed high above suspicion by his rank and reputation.”

“ Then try to induce him to act as a second for one of you, for if you kill this rascally viscount, you will need the testimony of an influential man to protect you.”

“ He won't refuse me this service, I am sure,” said M. Larmor.

“ It seems to me,” remarked the colonel, “ that my place might be filled to advantage by some one who has never had any difference with La Cadière. I have had several quarrels with him, and have even laid violent hands upon him, and if he finds that I am to act as a second in the duel, he will probably declare that there will be foul play.”

“ That is true ; even a stranger might be better. Any non-commissioned officer, or even a common soldier would do.”

“ No ; that would cause trouble, and perhaps bring the wrath of the Minister of War upon us. I see only one way, and that is to apply to another friend of mine who is not an admirer of La Cadière, but who has had nothing to do with the rascal's incarceration, and does not even know where he is. I will see him, and try to persuade him to take my place. But we have no time to lose ; it is absolutely necessary that the duel should take place before night. We cannot set a later hour than four o'clock.”

“ I will be ready by then. The friend I depend upon is in Paris, and I am sure of finding him at home at three o'clock.”

“ I am not sure of finding *my* friend,” replied Sigoulès, “ but I hope to. If not, we must fall back upon my old comrade, and compel La Cadière to accept him.”

“ I only fear one thing, and that is that La Cadière will absolutely refuse to fight even with seconds of his own choosing. The man must be a coward.”

“ He is ; but I shall give him his choice between a duel and immediate arrest. He sets great value on his life, and as conviction and execution would certainly be his fate if he refused the duel, he will prefer the chance of killing you.”

“ That's probable. Where shall I meet you ? ”

“ At the foot of the column on the Place de la Bastille,” replied the colonel, after reflecting for a moment. “ The house we must go to is near there.”

“ Very well ; I will be punctual.”

“ You must fight with swords. The duel will take place in a garden where no one can see you, but pistol-shots would certainly attract the attention of the neighbours.”

“ The sword is the weapon I prefer.”

"Very good. But one word more. You scarcely know me. I am not sure that I have even told you my name. My name is Sigoulès; I am a lieutenant-colonel in the African Chasseurs. If you have the slightest doubt of the honesty of my purpose—if you feel the slightest doubt of the expediency of the plan I have just proposed to you, say so frankly, and we will at once drop a project which is both singular and dangerous. Monsieur de la Cadière will sleep in prison to-night; that's all."

"He must sleep under three feet of earth!" retorted the implacable husband. "Till we meet again, sir," he added, shaking hands with Sigoulès, who said no more.

The colonel and Roger now drove to Chardin's house, and on the way Sigoulès explained the state of affairs to his friend, and gave him some instructions. "You are to act in the capacity of a gendarme," he remarked, "or of a guard, if you prefer that title. You must let no one enter Chardin's house, and you must prevent the old fellow from interfering with us in any way. I give you unlimited authority. If he attempts to leave the house, or raise any alarm, I even authorise you to lock him up."

"In his own room, then; for all the other apartments are occupied. The house is now virtually a prison."

"A prison of which you will be the jailer for the next two or three hours. Until I return no one must be allowed to enter or leave the house. I will ring four times in quick succession; but be sure that it is I before you open the door. I shan't be alone, but I shall take my companions straight into the garden, after which I will give you my final instructions, which will depend greatly upon circumstances. I don't yet know whether we shall succeed in procuring our two seconds. If one fails us, you will take his place; if both fail us, I shall be obliged to make the fourth one of the party; otherwise, you and I will only have to guard the entrance of the house, and prevent the combatants from being disturbed."

A few minutes later the cab drew up in front of M. Chardin's door. The colonel alighted leisurely and said to Roger: "Take the swords, pay the driver, and send him away. I will take another cab by-and-by."

This time Chardin opened the door almost immediately, but he started back in surprise on perceiving Sigoulès; indeed, he evinced an inclination to shut the door in his visitor's face without giving him time to explain. Plainly enough it was not the colonel he was expecting. But Sigoulès hastily pushed open the door, and succeeded in getting one foot upon the threshold. "What is the matter with you?" he asked. "You seem to be afraid of me."

"No," stammered the old man; "but I thought it was Madame de Marcenac who rang. It had been agreed that she should ring three times in succession."

"So I hit upon the signal very fortunately, otherwise you would perhaps have left me outside. So you have not seen Madame de Marcenac?"

"No, and I can't understand it, for she was to have come last night."

"Don't regret the delay. Her presence would have hampered us considerably. Come in," continued the colonel, turning to Roger. "What are you doing there in the street with your bundle under your arm?"

Roger instantly obeyed; and as soon as his friend had entered the house, Sigoulès coolly locked the door and put the key in his pocket, while Chardin looked on in silent consternation. "Now, my dear sir, suppose we go into the garden. We can talk better there," suggested Sigoulès.

Chardin made no objection; and they had no sooner reached the garden

than Sigoulès began to explore it carefully, hurrying up and down the walks, stamping on the ground to test the firmness of the soil, and shrugging his shoulders whenever he passed a bust of M. Thiers perched upon a pedestal of artificial rockwork. "May I take the liberty of asking what you intend to do in my garden?" the old man at last inquired.

"I will tell you presently," was the brusque reply. "How are the prisoners getting on?"

"I don't know; I could hold no communication with them, as you had locked them up. Madame Larmor certainly called me, and asked me to explain what had taken place; but as I did not understand myself——"

"You ought to have told her that it was by order of the countess."

"That is about what I did tell her; at least, I tried to console her by telling her that Madame de Marcenac would soon come to release her. She then went back to her room, and I have heard nothing more from her. Perhaps she has died of grief or starvation," added the old man, in a tragic tone.

"Starvation! Bah! when I laid her upon the bed, I saw on the table a very nice dinner, which she had not yet touched; so I have no fears on that score, and women don't die of grief. How about La Cadière?"

"I have not ventured to go near the cellar. I fancied I could hear an occasional groan, however. If any misfortune happened to him, I should be in a frightful position."

"Oh! he's a tough customer; besides, in a couple of hours he will be unbound, and free to move about as he pleases. He has eaten nothing since yesterday, and I don't want him to accuse us of having kept him fasting so as to master him more easily. You probably have some bread and meat in the house."

"I have nothing. To get rid of my servant, I told her that I was going out to breakfast."

"But you have some wine; your cellar is full of it. Roger, go to the nearest cook-shop or restaurant and get some ham or beef, whatever you like, providing it is substantial. Here's the key of the house."

Roger hurried away, and Chardin, growing more and more alarmed, said, piteously: "So I am a prisoner as well!"

"Only for a short time, Monsieur Chardin. Your period of seclusion will be over before night; and as you might be tempted to do something that would ruin my plans, you will not, I am sure, object to being placed under the care of a faithful friend of mine. I am guarding you now, but as soon as my friend returns I shall be obliged to go away again, and he will take my place."

"But why do you keep me a prisoner? What have I done to be treated like a malefactor?"

"All I do is for your good, my dear sir. Suppose now, a tragedy was about to occur here——"

"A tragedy!" exclaimed Chardin, greatly frightened.

"Yes, a tragedy which may seriously compromise all who take part in it, and which it will be better for you to know nothing about."

"What, do you intend to murder some one here in my house?"

"That is saying a little too much, Monsieur Chardin. But supposing a man should die in your house, the best thing that could happen to you would certainly be for some one to place you in a position to prove that whatever occurred transpired without your knowledge or consent."

"And how could I prove it? I should always be accused of allowing

my house to be used for the perpetration of a crime. Even if I declared that you entered it without my consent, no one would believe me."

"Then they would make a great mistake. The fact that Monsieur de la Cadière entered the house without your permission, by the aid of a rope-ladder, is sufficient proof of it. But I have a sure way of preventing any anxiety on your part. I intend to lock you up in your room. You will see nothing and know nothing. I will take the whole responsibility upon myself, and I run a far greater risk than you do, Monsieur Chardin. I shall, perhaps, lose my rank in the army, while you can lose nothing."

"Do you call the esteem of my fellow-citizens nothing?"

"Your fellow-citizens won't esteem you any the less; on the contrary, you will be considered the victim of a band of cut-throats," replied Sigoulès.

Chardin was nearly distracted. "Why don't you let me go off, if you take so much interest in me?" he pleaded. "My presence here isn't necessary; and I assure you that I shall feel no desire to return for a long time. I will hurry away as fast as I can; and then I shall feel sure that no one will accuse me of being your accomplice."

"You reason very well, my dear sir," replied Sigoulès, coldly, "and I should be very glad to release you, if I were not satisfied that you would go straight to the nearest station-house and send a whole squad of policemen after us. I am anxious not to be interfered with until the affair is settled. After that, I will go for the police myself. So, my dear Chardin, make the best of it; your imprisonment will be of short duration."

The old man was about to make another protest, when Roger re-appeared. "The food is at the cellar-door," he remarked.

"Thanks," replied the colonel. "All we need now is a plate, a cork-screw, and a glass, which our kind host will certainly lend us. Come, Monsieur Chardin, show us the way to your dining-room."

Chardin mechanically obeyed. Roger found the things he wanted without any difficulty, not forgetting a candle, which he lighted. "Now, my dear sir, you have only to take possession of your own room," said Sigoulès. "Will you be kind enough to go up there at once?"

"So you are really going to lock me up?" murmured the old man.

"Only for an hour or two, Monsieur Chardin. It will be no great hardship. I have been shut up in the guard-house a week at a time." As he spoke, he pushed M. Chardin gently towards the staircase, and the old gentleman, seeing that resistance was useless, submitted, though not with a very good grace. "Here you are, comfortably installed in your own apartment!" resumed Sigoulès, with his most affable air. "You must need a little rest after so much excitement, and no one shall be allowed to disturb you. I will give you one bit of advice, however. This window overlooks the garden in which you may presently hear a stir. I trust that you will carefully abstain from looking out. If you were imprudent enough to open the windows and look out, you would lose all your advantages. You would see what occurred, and be instantly transformed into an eye-witness. You would be asked for explanations which you would be compelled to furnish, while if you remain secreted in your chamber, you will know no more about the affair than if it had occurred in China or Tonquin. Till by-and-by, my dear sir."

With these concluding words the colonel left the room, locked the door, and rejoined Roger de Bussière, who had waited for him at the foot of the stairs. Sigoulès had the key of the cellar-door in his pocket. He opened it, and went down first, candle in hand. La Cadière had suc-

ceeded in struggling into a sitting posture, but he had not managed to unfasten the ropes that bound him.

He darted a savage glance at the colonel and his companion, but he did not utter a word. "You must have passed a rather uncomfortable night," remarked Sigoulès, "besides being very hungry. If you had not done so much mischief, I should have allowed you rather more freedom; but your captivity will soon cease now, and I have brought you something to eat."

"Why don't you kill me at once? I should much prefer it," said La Cadière, sullenly.

"I don't mean to kill you. I come to offer you a chance of escape."

"That is to say, you mean to hand me over to the police. A fine chance that!"

"That is not what I came to propose, by any means. In an hour's time I will tell you my conditions, and it will be for you to accept or decline them. In the meantime, here is some breakfast for you, and some wine. Roger, unbind this gentleman's right arm—his right arm only—and pour out some wine for him."

This time the prisoner offered no resistance. He seemed to have regained at least a portion of his accustomed self-possession. "One would think we were playing the great prison scene in the 'Tour de Nesle,'" he sneered. "Marguerite de Bourgogne alone is wanting. It is she who ought to set me free. But I forgot, you have locked her up."

"If you refer to Madame Larmor, she is a long distance off now."

The viscount drained his glass with pretended carelessness, but his face showed that the colonel's words had not fallen upon deaf ears. "Is the countess well?" he inquired, helping himself to a slice of *pâté*.

"Madame de Marcenac? I really don't know. But I did not come here to talk about my acquaintances; so I will go, leaving my friend here to keep you company."

"Thanks; I prefer to be alone, unless you send old Chardin down."

"Chardin left the house some time ago."

"Indeed; well, I don't care to be left here in this style much longer. I have cramps in every limb, and it will take me at least half an hour to regain any freedom of movement after I have been unbound."

"It is now twenty minutes past two, Roger," said Sigoulès, looking at his watch. "This gentleman can certainly finish his breakfast in forty minutes, so at three o'clock precisely remove everything, for he might stab himself with a fork, or cut himself with the bottle or the wine-glass. Then you will allow him to use his left arm, and if he wishes to stand awhile, you will kindly assist him. At four o'clock, you will request him to lie down again upon the floor, and cut the ropes that bind him with one hand, while with the other, you hold him in check with this revolver. It is a six-shooter, and it is loaded." As he spoke, Sigoulès handed a weapon to Roger, who put it in his pocket. "When you have done this, you will back out of the room, lock the door and remain on guard there till I return. I shall be back by four o'clock, and perhaps sooner."

"Very well; you will find me at my post."

### XVIII.

SIGOULES reached the Place de la Bastille half an hour in advance of the appointed time and after lighting a cigar—he was never without one—he

began to walk round and round the column erected in honour of the citizens who fell fighting against Charles X. He was wondering whether the husband would make his appearance before the baron, or *vice versa*. Just as he had finished his ninth round, he saw Paul de Lizy coming up the Boulevard Beaumarchais. The colonel hastened towards him, and led him to the spot where they were to await the arrival of M. Larmor.

"I have been weak enough to yield to a whim I don't understand," said Paul, "so here I am; but I don't go any further until I know what use you intend to make of me. Why did you insist upon my coming here?"

"To put a stop to Cadière's rascality."

"You gave me much the same answer at the door of the club-house. If you have no other explanation to offer, you might have spared me the trouble of coming here."

"I will explain things as clearly as possible, although I must be brief. Two persons—not counting yourself—have greatly suffered owing to this scoundrel's slanders and villany. I make no mention of the unfortunate Basfroi, whom he has already despatched to a better world. But Madame de Marcenac and Madame Larmor are not out of his reach. He may continue to attack the reputation of the countess; he will not fail to do so if he is taken before the assizes. He may even deceive the authorities by his attempts to prove that the Fontainebleau murder was committed at the instigation of Basfroi's heiress."

"I know that, but what can be done?" said Paul.

"Should he escape from the police whom you have set upon his track, Madame de Marcenac will find herself no better off. There will be a perfect deluge of anonymous letters. He has already resorted to this mode of warfare in his attacks upon Madame Larmor, and he won't cease in his efforts until she has fallen a victim to her husband's fury."

"That man is a brute, and I can't say that I take much interest in his troubles. He is the indirect cause of all Madame de Marcenac's misfortunes."

"Unquestionably; but in the event of his death, his widow need no longer conceal the fact that she is the real mother of the child that Madame de Marcenac so generously declares to be her own. Now, suppose that Larmor compelled this scoundrel to give him satisfaction."

"But an honest man can't fight with a murderer."

"That's true, generally speaking, though there may be an occasional exception to the rule, as in the present instance; for Monsieur Larmor insists upon it. He swears that Monsieur de la Cadière shall perish by his hand, and you can have no conception of his savage determination. I am now waiting for him here, and I am surprised that he has not already arrived. He is probably trying to find a second, for he is going to fight La Cadière."

"Then you know where the rascal is?"

"Yes, I do, and the duel will be fought near here, in a garden placed at my disposal—a garden surrounded by high walls. Monsieur Larmor is eager to fight, and another civil engineer, a friend of his, a very honourable man, who is acquainted with the whole history of the affair, will act as his second."

"And who will perform a like service for La Cadière?" sneered Paul de Lizy. "Some gambler, or escaped convict, I suppose?"

"No; La Cadière will not be allowed to choose his second. I thought at first of acting in that capacity myself. However, the liability of losing my command deterred me. But you, who are no longer in the service—"

"What, do you think that I would so degrade myself?"

"Oh ! I thought it quite probable that you would refuse, so I have asked an old officer in my regiment. He will gladly serve in your stead. La Cadière will perhaps object to him, as they had a quarrel years ago, but I shall compel the scoundrel to yield."

"Then why did you trouble me about the matter ?"

"Because a duel of such an exceptional character should only take place with every possible precaution ; there must not only be witnesses to testify that everything was done according to the code of honour, but these witnesses must be of the best possible standing, both morally and socially."

"But if one of the men was killed, we should be considered accomplices."

"And why ? Because the duel will not take place in a forest or an open field ? You forget that an outraged husband has a right to make his own conditions. You spoke just now of what the situation would be in case one of the combatants were killed. There are three hypotheses to be considered. The first, and most probable, is that Monsieur Larmor will kill La Cadière, of whose skill as a swordsman I know nothing ; but who is certainly a coward. In that case, the authorities being made acquainted with the moral character and antecedents of the deceased, will not display much zeal in pursuing the adversary who freed the earth of such a scoundrel, or the honourable men who witnessed the combat. If, however, the contrary should happen, Madame Larmor will be a widow ; a fact which would not be without its advantages. In that case, moreover, the authorities would find the assassin they are searching for. If they censured us for not having delivered him up, we could reply that it was not our business to do so, and that Monsieur Larmor strenuously opposed such a step, as his second will testify. Whatever may be the result of the combat, I shall send for the police as soon as it is over. The third hypothesis remains to be considered, but that is so improbable."

Fate decreed that this third hypothesis should not be submitted to Paul's consideration, for the colonel, instead of finishing his sentence, abruptly exclaimed : "I see Monsieur Larmor alighting from a cab with his second at the corner of the Rue Saint Antoine. I hope you have decided to stand by me. Let us go and meet him."

"No ; I am not sufficiently at ease respecting the probable consequences of your absurd scheme."

"I will explain myself more freely presently. We shall have plenty of time to talk as we go to the house ; besides, these gentlemen have seen you now, and you will make yourself appear ridiculous if you run away."

Paul remained with his friend. He was still in doubt as to what he should eventually do ; and before he fully made up his mind he was not sorry to have an opportunity to converse with this husband who was so eager to stake his life against that of a scoundrel. M. Larmor was unquestionably the same man whom Paul had seen in the villa at Fontainebleau, though his manner was even more stern, and his face more gloomy. His companion looked at least ten years his senior, and did not resemble him in the least. He was tall, slender, and elegantly dressed, and had the intellectual, distinguished air of a worldly savant—of a man who willingly frequents fashionable drawing-rooms in order to reach the Institute more quickly. Paul read his character at a glance, and instantly began to regard the colonel's scheme with great favour, since such a man as the stranger had considered it worthy of his approval. M. Larmor naturally began by

introducing his friend, and the name he pronounced was one with which all Paris is familiar—the name of an engineer who has rendered himself famous by his scientific achievements and his successful management of several gigantic enterprises. When the colonel, in his turn, presented Paul de Lizy, M. Larmor manifested no surprise whatever, which conclusively proved that he had never heard of the baron before.

The distinguished stranger then opened the conversation by saying: "Gentlemen, I think it only proper to tell you that I have not consented to act as my friend Larmor's second without a full knowledge of all the circumstances connected with this affair. I know that my friend is to meet an adversary unworthy of him; but this is one of the cases in which all secondary considerations must be overlooked on account of the nature of the injury received; and I am happy to see, gentlemen, that you agree with me on this point, as you are willing to lend us your aid."

Paul, whose consent was thus taken for granted, felt inclined to raise some objections; but he could not do so without placing Sigoulès in a very embarrassing position, and himself in a most unenviable light. "Yes, monsieur," exclaimed the colonel, "this is a case in which a man must fight in a cellar rather than not fight at all. That is exactly what I was saying to my friend as you came up. If we were summoned before a magistrate to give an account of our conduct, we should have no trouble in vindicating ourselves. The matter would end there, and public opinion would uphold us unquestionably."

"That is my opinion," replied the stranger. "Will you be kind enough to tell us where we are going?"

"Only a short distance from here, and I should advise you to send away your cab; in case of accident, it will be easy to find another."

"Well, suppose we start at once. The preliminaries will, of course, take up some time, and we must not allow night to overtake us before the matter is adjusted."

"You have only to follow me," replied the colonel, taking Paul's arm.

Paul was therefore led away before he had time to utter a word, but his submission was probably due to the fact that the hypotheses expounded by Sigoulès had impressed him favourably—one of them, especially. His task of assuring Madame Larmor's flight would be wonderfully simplified by her husband's death. And Paul, to his surprise, began wishing for this death, though he would have preferred not to witness it.

On the other hand, if M. Larmor survived, he (Paul) would have very difficult work before him. Everything was ready for Madame Larmor to embark from Havre the next morning, but many precautions would have to be taken to ensure her safe departure; besides, he must inform her of the arrangements which had been made, and persuade her to go away without seeing Madame de Marcenac again. Paul consoled himself, at least partially, by the assurance that he would have plenty of time for all this after the duel. He did not exactly know where to find the Rue des Lions Saint Paul, where M. Chardin lived, but it could not be far from Saint Paul's Church, the dome and portico of which were now in sight.

"I did not like to contradict you before these men," he said rather sulkily to Sigoulès, "but I have not promised to see the end of this affair, and I think you are getting us both into a very bad scrape."

"That is because you have not yet considered the third hypothesis."

"The devil take your hypotheses! The reality is a duel under the most absurd conditions, and I foresee a series of complications you have



not even thought of. How can you expect that the cur will not play you false at the very last moment?"

"He is under lock and key, as I told you before, and I shall know how to make him fight."

"And what part am I to play?"

"You will only see him on the duelling-ground; that is to say, in the garden where the combat will take place. We are almost there."

"Almost there! But where are we? What is the name of this street into which we have just turned?"

"It is the Rue Beautreillis."

Paul, who had never before heard of the Rue Beautreillis, made no reply, as the name had no significance to him. "I am not at all sure that I shall enter the house," he again said; "and at all events I warn you that as soon as the affair is over, I shall leave you to get out of the scrape as best you can."

Sigoulès was beginning to suspect Paul's motive, for it had occurred to him that Madame de Marcenac, being now almost reconciled with her repentant lover, might have intrusted him with the task of saving Madame Larmor, and have told him where she was concealed. The colonel, therefore, took good care not to tell Paul where he was taking him. "He is not familiar with this neighbourhood," thought Sigoulès, "and it will only be necessary for me to prevent him from reading the name at the corner of the street."

They had already passed the Rue Charles V., and Paul had not once looked up. As they turned into the Rue des Lions, Sigoulès managed to engross his attention by saying: "Look back and see if the gentlemen are following us."

Paul looked and replied: "They are close upon our heels."

"You do not see any suspicious looking person about, I hope?"

"There is no one else in the street."

"That is as it should be." The *ruse* had proved successful; Sigoulès had managed to get his friend round the corner without giving him time to read the name of the street. Chardin's dwelling was close by. "Do you see that house?" inquired the colonel, pausing a few steps from it—"the one with a high wall at one side of it? That wall incloses a garden where we shall be perfectly safe from any curious eye. I have the key of the house; but enough, here come the gentlemen."

M. Larmor and his friend had quickened their pace, so they were now only a few steps distant, and the colonel advancing to meet them, remarked, complacently: "Here we are, gentlemen!"

"The place appears well chosen," replied the second, who seemed inclined to approve everything that Sigoulès did. "I never saw this Rue des Lions Saint Paul before; but it is so deserted that it would be hard to find one better suited to our purpose."

"What, is this the Rue des Lions?" exclaimed Paul. And, glancing up, he perceived the number over the door. "And this is No. 15!" he added, bestowing a look of mingled surprise and anger on Sigoulès.

"Yes; No. 15," repeated M. Larmor's second, mechanically.

"Excuse me, but I must say a word to the colonel," interposed Paul.

Sigoulès would have been glad to avoid the explanation, but there was no help for it. "Certainly," he replied, with really superb assurance. "It is occupied by Monsieur Chardin, a highly respectable man, a retired merchant, and formerly a friend of Madame de Marcenac's father."

"And it was here that you left La Cadière?"

"Yes; but under lock and key, and well guarded, I assure you. I placed him under the watchful eye of an ex-quartermaster of my own regiment. Chardin is shut up, but he is very comfortable. There need be no further delay; he will not interfere with the duel."

"The duel! But, unfortunate man, do you know what you are doing in bringing the husband and lover face to face in the garden of this house? Madame Larmor was brought here by Madame de Marcenac, who this very morning requested me to call for her, and take her to the Havre railway-station."

"I guessed as much, and I did well not to tell you our destination. You would have refused to come."

"Yes, certainly; and I expect that you will abandon this project."

"It is too late to draw back; besides, I know that Madame Larmor is in the house. I have both seen and spoken to her."

"Did you tell her that two men, one of them her husband, and the other, perhaps, the father of her child, were about to engage in mortal combat before her eyes?"

"No, I locked her up where she can hear and see nothing."

"Locked her up! Have you locked up everybody, then?"

"I have locked up all the persons I found in the house, and I did perfectly right. Not one of them suspects what is about to take place. Now decide: if you leave me, I will try to explain your abrupt departure, but I will not be responsible for what occurs."

Before Paul could reply, M. Larmor's second came forward, saying, with his accustomed politeness: "Can it be, gentlemen, that any unforeseen accident is likely to occur? If I can assist you in averting it, pray command me."

"Oh, no, monsieur; nothing of the kind," hastily replied the colonel. "Monsieur de Lizy just raised a few objections which I have entirely satisfied, and there now only remains for us to enter the house."

Paul dared not argue the matter in this stranger's presence, so he abandoned the idea of going away. The door was noiselessly opened. No one was visible, for Roger de Bussière had obeyed the colonel's orders implicitly, and was now on guard in the cellar below. The colonel at once led his companions into the garden, whereupon M. Larmor's second remarked: "Nothing is now wanting but the swords and one of the combatants."

"The swords are there under that shed, yonder; and as for the other combatant, I will bring him to you. Please to wait for me here; I don't think it necessary for you to be present at the conversation I am about to have with him."

"I only want to see him at a sword's length," replied M. Larmor, grimly.

"It will be better so; and as he may make some objections to fighting I ask a quarter of an hour to persuade him."

"It is granted, monsieur; I leave the matter entirely to you, and accept in advance any conditions you may see fit to make; but if he doesn't kill me, I shall kill him!"

"I understand you," replied the colonel, gravely. "My dear Paul, I leave you with these gentlemen," he added. "It is not necessary for you to come with me."

Hurrying down the cellar stairs, the impetuous colonel found Roger standing on guard, revolver in hand, and through the grating in the upper

part of the door he espied, by the light of a candle burning on an empty cask, La Cadière making vigorous passes at the wall with a lathe which he had found on the floor. The viscount seemed to be in excellent health and spirits, for he was singing gaily as he fenced. The colonel's instructions had been executed to the letter, and his prisoner had been free to move about as he pleased for three-quarters of an hour or so. "Ah ! here you are," he exclaimed, on perceiving the colonel. "I am delighted to see you, for I feel like talking a little. The rascal who's guarding me won't even answer when I speak to him."

"He has only acted in obedience to the orders I gave him," said Sigoulès.

"However, I preferred to devote my attention to the breakfast you brought me, and I was pleased to find that Chardin's wine is really very fair. I did not leave a drop in the bottle."

"Then, as you no longer feel any bad effects from the uncomfortable night you have passed, I wish to ask you if you are particularly anxious to appear before the Assizes?"

"That depends upon what you have to offer me in exchange, for if I go there, I shan't go alone, and it won't be unpleasant to have a pretty woman beside me in the dock."

"It is not advisable for you to rely upon that; and in any event it would not improve your situation very much. You had much better accept the proposal I am about to make to you."

"Oh, ho ! overtures of peace. Well, let me hear your proposal."

"Will you fight a duel with swords with Monsieur Larmor?"

"Ah, ha ! now I understand. And why should I fight with him, pray? Merely because I was his wife's lover? I have nothing against him; quite the contrary."

"It is useless for you to talk like that. He has sworn to kill you."

"Very well, then; there is nothing to prevent him from gratifying his desire. Go and fetch him. From that opening in the door he can shoot me at his leisure."

"Monsieur Larmor would scorn to murder you. He prefers to stake his life against yours, although the stakes are by no means equal."

"Yes; my life is worth considerably more than that old brute's. Where and when do you wish us to fight?"

"Here, in the garden, in a few minutes' time."

"Then you must have brought old Larmor with you. But do you imagine that merely to gratify you, I shall set myself up as a target for this fellow, who has probably been practising for a couple of days, while I have been tied up here like a calf for twenty hours?"

"I regret that I was obliged to interfere at all; it was your own fault. You should not have tried to murder Monsieur Chardin."

"Yes; I came like a fool into the trap you set for me. I'm caught. Do what you like with me, but I am in no condition to fight."

"You just told me that you had completely recovered, and I found you practising with a foil, which you seemed to be handling with perfect ease."

"Oh, I fence tolerably well, and I won't conceal from you that if I accepted your proposal I should be pretty sure of ridding my dear Gabrielle of her bear of a husband; but I don't see why I should do her this service. And then I might be killed myself, and that would afford her almost as much pleasure as to be made a widow."

"But what do you hope to gain by refusing? You have to choose between immediate arrest and a duel with Monsieur Larmor."

"As a mere matter of taste, I should prefer the duel; but what should I gain by it? I should merely have the chance of dying of a sword-thrust in Chardin's garden. But that compensation seems to me hardly sufficient. If I were sure that you would set me at liberty in case I killed the husband, it would be different."

La Cadière had touched the weak point of the colonel's plan. Evidently enough the rascal could not be induced to take part in the duel if he was offered nothing in exchange for his consent. "And in that case you would be willing to fight?" inquired Sigoulès.

"Perhaps so. Will you promise to protect me from the police, and to furnish me with the means of reaching England?"

"Certainly not. It is a great deal already to allow you to depart at your own risk."

"On condition that I fight. If that will satisfy you——"

"I also wish you to sign a paper acknowledging that, having deeply injured Monsieur Larmor, you have, of your own free will, granted him the satisfaction he demanded, and that the combat was fairly conducted."

"This is, of course, to be used in case I am killed, so that you and your band may not be accused of murdering me. But if I survive, what will you do then? Shall I be at liberty to leave the house?"

"I will open the door for you myself."

"Oh, yes, I understand; the police will be lying in wait for me outside. You must promise me that will not be the case. Come, will you promise to give me time to make my escape?"

"I shall take no further trouble about you."

"But how about the others? You told me that Larmor had brought a second. And there is also Bussière, who keeps his pistol levelled at me. Do you make the same promise for them?"

"They will do nothing without my consent. Decide, and let us put an end to this discussion."

"My choice is made; I will fight!" replied Cadière. "That is, if you will swear that none of you will pursue me after I have left the house, and that you will allow me the time I need to reach a place of safety."

"I consent. Write the declaration I am going to dictate to you," said the colonel, drawing a pencil and note-book from his pocket, and handing them to the prisoner. Sigoulès then dictated, and the viscount acknowledged in writing that the duel had been consented to by him, and that all the arrangements for it had been made in a strictly honourable manner. "It is done," he said, returning the note-book; "now it is your turn. Do you promise, upon your word of honour, not to detain me, under any pretext whatever, after the duel; and to take no steps against me until after two hours have elapsed?"

"I promise it."

"Then I am ready. Open the door."

"Open it, Roger!" ordered the colonel.

"I suppose you intend to do things in the regular way?" remarked La Cadière, as he sauntered out of his prison with admirably feigned nonchalance, "I shall need a second."

"Monsieur de Lizy, whom you know, is also upstairs."

"Ah, it seems to be a regular conspiracy."

"Not at all. Monsieur de Lizy came here because I begged him to come, and my reason for doing so was that his presence would be an additional guarantee. Four witnesses are none too many to testify that

the two opponents fought voluntarily and fairly. Do you accept the baron as your second?"

"I would as soon have him as any one else. And now, colone , will you kindly show me the way to the garden?"

Sigoulès led the way; M. de la Cadière followed, and Roger de Bussière brought up the rear. M. Larmor was conversing in a low tone with his second; Paul was standing a little apart from the others. The pretended viscount showed no trouble on perceiving them. He had assumed an impassive countenance, and his manner was polite and dignified much to the astonishment of Sigoulès, who had expected fresh gibes and insulting remarks, and very possibly an attempt to back out. "Gentlemen," said the colonel, "I am sorry to have kept you waiting; but I was obliged to confer with Monsieur de la Cadière concerning the conditions of the meeting. This is the decision we have arrived at. The duel will continue until one of the antagonists becomes unable to hold a sword; and, however it may end, Monsieur de la Cadière will be free to leave the house."

"And if I am killed," said La Cadière, "you are to explain my death to those who have a right to know the facts. These arrangements suit me, and if they suit these gentlemen also we can begin."

M. Larmor signified his acceptance of the conditions by a gesture. "My dear Paul," remarked the colonel, "Monsieur de la Cadière wishes you to act as his second, and I beg that you will not refuse his request. The sun is already low, and if we delay any longer these gentlemen won't be able to see distinctly. Roger, bring the swords from the shed."

The ex-quartermaster obeyed; and Paul did not utter a word. M. Larmor, white with anger, stood waiting, with his arms crossed upon his breast, while his second gazed with evident curiosity at M. de la Cadière, who was walking to and fro, casting furtive glances at the closed shutters of the second-floor windows. Roger soon returned with the swords, and handed them to Paul de Lizy. "Now, gentlemen, your duties begin and mine end," said Sigoulès, addressing the seconds. "Monsieur de Bussière and I are henceforth merely spectators."

"I am ready," said M. de la Cadière, taking off his coat and throwing it down upon the grass.

M. Larmor hastily removed his coat in turn, and his second, whose calmness had not once left him, immediately entered into a consultation with Paul de Lizy, who had reluctantly accepted the post which his friend had almost forced upon him. They measured the swords, which proved to be of equal length, and they selected the cross-path as the most suitable spot for the encounter. The two antagonists were placed there, face to face; they crossed swords, and it was the friend of the injured husband who gave the signal for the conflict. The colonel and Roger stood a short distance behind the seconds, with their backs turned towards the house. At first the antagonists seemed to be only testing each other's skill, but this trifling was not at all to M. Larmor's taste, and he did not waste much time on preliminaries. While Cadière, firmly planted upon his feet, with his body erect and his hand admirably placed, seemed bent on not departing from the defensive, in order to study his adversary's method, M. Larmor attacked him with positive fury, delivering a series of direct thrusts which were parried with wonderful skill. The return thrusts did not come, however; so the attack was repeated again and again, with no better success than before, and without once throwing La Cadière off his guard. "That rascal must certainly have been a

fencing-master," thought the colonel. "I am not a bad swordsman myself, and yet I should have been wounded twice already by that infuriated husband."

Suddenly the viscount, taking advantage of a good opportunity, ventured a thrust in his turn, and the point of his sword grazed his antagonist's shoulder. "You expose yourself too much, sir," he remarked, coldly. "I inflicted a slight wound on you just now, and we are not fighting to inflict mere scratches upon each other."

This insolent remark increased the exasperation of M. Larmor, who renewed his attack with such impetuosity that this time La Cadière retreated a little, but his guard was not broken, and all his parades came in time. His policy evidently consisted in tiring out his opponent, in order to inflict a fatal wound when his strength became exhausted. Paul understood La Cadière's tactics, and though he did not feel a very tender interest in Gabrielle's husband, he thought it advisable to assert his authority as a second. So, stepping forward, he said, imperiously: "Enough; rest awhile."

La Cadière lowered his blade, but not until he had taken the precaution to spring back out of his enemy's reach. M. Larmor was also obliged to stop, and it was well for him that he did so, for he was out of breath. His second, who had calmly watched the progress of the combat, now approached La Cadière, and said: "Sir, it is not permissible to speak when one has weapons in one's hands."

"It is not only unseemly," chimed in the colonel, "but you obtain an advantage over your opponent by diverting his attention."

"On the contrary, it seems to me that the disadvantage is on my side, for I am obliged to think not only of what I am going to say," replied La Cadière, carelessly; "but as you judge differently, I will henceforth hold my peace. Besides, I will try to put an end to the affair as soon as possible, for night is coming on, and I might make a mistake in the dark."

"Go on," said Paul, impatiently.

It was again M. Larmor who began the attack. He rushed upon his enemy with flashing eyes and set teeth, but this time it was not long before he discovered that La Cadière had, indeed, changed his tactics, and assumed the offensive. The viscount's thrusts followed each other with such rapidity and precision that the husband's guard was broken. His hand grew visibly weaker, his breath began to fail him, and the further he retreated the closer La Cadière pressed him. In the silence of the lonely garden the clash of steel rang out so clearly and harshly that the sound could not fail to be heard some distance off. The end was fast approaching, for M. Larmor was being slowly but surely driven to the wall. He realised that he was lost, and with the strength born of desperation, and without making any further attempt to defend himself, he was about to make a violent lunge at his antagonist, when he received a thrust full in the breast. He staggered, but did not fall; and La Cadière was about to repeat the thrust, when the opening of a window diverted his attention for an instant, and glancing up at the house he sneered: "Look! there is Gabrielle come to witness the concluding scene."

But Larmor did not hear this infamous taunt; he did not even see his wife, who had just appeared at the window. He was struck with death, but he still had strength enough left to seize his sword by the middle of the blade and plunge it into his antagonist's body. It pierced La Cadière's heart, and the shock was so violent that the viscount fell to the ground.

Death had been instantaneous. The unfortunate Larmor fell unconscious into the arms of his second, and survived the scoundrel he had just slain by a few seconds. A wild shriek rang out from the window; and then she who had uttered it suddenly disappeared. Sigoulès turned and looked up at the window, but there was no longer any one visible. Roger de Bussière, overcome with consternation, knew not what to do. "Come with me," said the colonel, who never seemed to lose his presence of mind. And leaving the seconds on the scene of the conflict, he dragged the ex-quartermaster towards the house in which Chardin and Madame Larmor were confined.

On the first floor they found Chardin in a terrible state of mind. He had not dared to open the windows, but he had heard the fighting in the garden, and he was pacing to and fro with his face buried in his hands. "Hurry off as fast as you can, my man!" cried Sigoulès. "The key is in the door. Go, and don't stop to look behind you. Go wherever you like. To the Countess de Marcenac, if you feel so inclined," he added, pushing the old man out of the room. "Now for the other," he murmured.

In the room above he made a sad discovery. Madame Larmor was lying motionless on the floor, directly under the window. Sigoulès knelt and placed his hand upon her heart. It had ceased to beat. "The shock has killed her!" he said. "This is a complication I did not foresee."

As he was leaving the room he noticed a letter addressed to Madame de Marcenac lying on the table, and he picked it up and put it in his pocket. On his way back to the garden, he met Paul de Lizy, who said to him in a husky tone: "Come and see your work. There are two dead men in the garden."

"I know it," said the colonel, coldly. "My third hypothesis has been realised—the one I kept to myself, because it seemed improbable."

"And what are you going to do now, you unfortunate fellow?"

"I am going to the same commissary of police you saw this morning, and I shall tell him the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is the only way out of the difficulty now."

## EPILOGUE.

At noon, on the day following the tragedy which had taken place in Chardin's garden, Madame de Marcenac and Martha Morgan were still waiting for tidings of Paul de Lizy. The previous night and morning had seemed interminable to them, although they were fully of opinion that the baron could not return until he had accomplished the difficult task of saving Madame Larmor. Martha moved restlessly about the little room in which Madame de Marcenac was sitting, but finally paused for some little time before the window facing the garden. "What are you looking at?" inquired the countess.

"It is strange," replied the girl, "but in the Champs Elysées over there I can see a shabbily-dressed man who seems to be looking this way, and making signs to me. He is very like Monsieur Chardin. Ah! he is lifting his hat, and bowing to me. It is he! Come and see!"

Madame de Marcenac hastened to the window, and instantly recognised the old man in spite of the unfamiliar garb he wore. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed; "what can have happened that he should have to disguise himself like that?"

"And why hasn't he dared to come to the main entrance in the Faubourg Saint Honoré?" added Martha.

"Run and open the gate in the Avenue Gabriel," cried the countess.

Ten minutes later Chardin entered the room, leaning upon Martha's arm. He appeared to be completely overcome, either with fatigue or fear, and sank heavily into an arm-chair, where he sat silent and motionless, with hanging arms, drooping head, and haggard eyes. "Tell me what is the matter, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed the countess, in an agony of suspense.

As Chardin made no reply, Martha hurried out of the room and soon returned with a glass of port wine, which revived the old man a little. He then managed to murmur: "Thank God you haven't been arrested!"

"Arrested! What could have led you to suppose such a thing?"

"What occurred at my house last evening?"

"What was that? Has Gabrielle's husband found her?"

"I don't know. I left my home last night. I was driven away by a friend of Monsieur de Lizy, Colonel Sigoulès."

"Shall I never hear the last of that scoundrel?"

"He is no scoundrel; he saved my life. If it had not been for him, La Cadière would have killed me as he killed my poor friend Basfroi. On the night before last he climbed over the wall and tried to compel me to surrender the list of Basfroi's creditors to him. I refused, and he attacked me; but just then the colonel made his appearance with a man who was a stranger to me, and they captured La Cadière, and shut him up in a cellar. They also locked Madame Larmor up in her chamber, but I don't know whether she is still there."

Madame de Marcenac now perceived that she would be unable to obtain any further information from her visitor until he had regained his strength, so she bade Martha bring him a second glass of port. Chardin drank the wine, ate two or three biscuits, and then exclaimed, with a sigh: "I feel better now. I was nearly starved. I had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours."

"You shall have a more substantial repast in a few moments," said the countess; "but pray collect your thoughts, and tell me exactly what has occurred. It terrifies me beyond measure to see you in this condition."

"I should be glad to re-assure you, but I scarcely know where to begin, my mind is so confused. If you would only question me, I think I could get along better, and that I should be able to answer you clearly."

"Very well," replied Madame de Marcenac, who thereupon began to ply the old man with questions, in reply to which he gave her an exaggerated account of the dramatic events which had occurred on the night that La Cadière had tried to murder him. Chardin spoke slowly, and gave a quantity of details of no real interest, and Madame de Marcenac was almost frantic with impatience and anxiety; still, she dared not interrupt the old man for fear of prolonging this almost interminable narrative. "Go on, my friend, I beseech you!" she murmured; "what occurred yesterday?"

Chardin then related the circumstances of the colonel's return, and his own imprisonment. "M. Sigoulès," he said, "locked me up in my bedroom, but through the shutters I saw Monsieur de Lizy enter my garden, accompanied by two gentlemen, who were entire strangers to me."

"Monsieur de Lizy!" repeated the countess in astonishment.

"Yes; and I noticed at once that he did not seem to be very well acquainted with his companions; for while they were talking together Monsieur de Lizy walked about the garden alone. The others were past middle age. One of them had whiskers, and the other had a full grey beard."



"Good heavens!" cried the countess, "what if—But go on, my friend."

Chardin then proceeded to describe the preliminaries of the duel. "I had not the courage to witness it," he added. "I left the window as soon as they crossed swords, and——"

"But who fought?" interrupted the countess, now as pale as death.

"La Cadière and the gentleman with the grey beard."

Madame de Marcenac seemed to breathe more freely. She had feared that Paul had been one of the combatants, and that the old man had come to announce his death.

"Then," continued Chardin, "I heard a window open—a window in the apartment where Madame Larmor was confined—then a loud shriek, and a sound as of some one falling on the floor."

"Ah, Gabrielle is dead! Didn't you go to her help?"

"A moment later the colonel burst into my room like a madman. I tried to question him, but he seized me by the shoulders and pushed me out of the room, telling me to go where I liked."

"And why didn't you come here?"

"I lost my senses completely, feeling sure that a murder had been committed in my house. I was certain that the police would go there, and I only thought of flight. If I had only had sufficient money for my travelling expenses, I should have left the country, but I merely had forty francs in my pocket, so feeling sure that the detectives were on my track, and being anxious to escape them, I entered the establishment of a dealer in second-hand clothes, and purchased this disguise. Then I wandered about all night, nearly dead with cold, hunger, and fear, and when you saw me this morning near your garden-gate I was completely exhausted, and had almost resolved to speak to a police-officer and request him to take me into custody."

When this strange story was ended, Madame de Marcenac drew Martha aside, and said: "Take care of this poor man; I am going out." She was, indeed, about to ring and order her carriage when a footman entered, and said: "Colonel Sigoulès wishes to know if madame will do him the honour to receive him?"

"Show him in at once," was the countess's immediate reply.

Chardin uttered a faint groan, and would have tried to conceal himself had he been able to do so, but fatigue and emotion paralysed his movements. Sigoulès paused for an instant in surprise, as he reached the threshold. He had not expected to find Chardin at Madame de Marcenac's. "What news do you bring?" inquired the countess.

"La Cadière is dead," replied the colonel, gravely.

"Slain in a duel by Gabrielle's husband?"

"Yes, madame; and before he died he killed his adversary."

"Then Gabrielle is a widow?"

A cloud passed over the colonel's stern face, and instead of replying he handed Madame de Marcenac the letter he had found in Madame Larmor's room. The countess took it with a trembling hand, tore open the envelope, and perused its contents. "This letter tells me nothing," she at last remarked. "Gabrielle only writes that she despairs of making her escape, and commends her daughter to my care."

"Her daughter is an orphan, madame. The shock killed Madame Larmor. The physicians say she died from the bursting of a blood-vessel." Profound grief is mute. Madame de Marcenac did not utter a word. "I must accuse myself of having been the involuntary cause of her death,"

continued the colonel. "It was I who compelled La Cadière to fight. I hoped that Monsieur Larmor would slay him; but, instead of that, they killed each other."

"Under Gabrielle's very eyes!"

"I flattered myself that she would not see them; but I was unfortunately mistaken. Still, I could not rest until I had told you that I alone am to blame. Paul had nothing whatever to do with it."

"It was his duty to prevent this terrible duel."

"He had no chance of doing so, madame. I don't shirk the responsibility of what I have done. La Cadière assassinated Basfroi, and his death was but a mild punishment for his many crimes; besides, the duel was conducted in the fairest manner. The authorities will molest no one."

"Are you sure of that?" exclaimed Chardin, now raising his head.

"I have just received that assurance from the magistrate who investigated the matter. He found Basfroi's list in your *escritoire*."

"So, sir," said the countess, after a moment's silence, "you come to announce—as if it were a piece of great good fortune—that the death of my dearest friend has simplified a most perplexing situation. Was it Monsieur de Lizy who intrusted you with this message?"

"No, madame; Paul de Lizy is as deeply distressed as you can be."

"He has shown himself sadly wanting in energy. I cannot forgive him. I am going to leave France. Advise him, sir, to do the same," said Madame de Marcenac, looking Sigoulès full in the face.

The colonel's eyes did not waver; but he slowly retreated to the door by which he had entered the room, and flung it wide open. "You surely will not condemn him without a hearing," said he. "Come, Paul, and plead your own cause."

Before the colonel had ceased to speak, Paul was at the feet of the countess. "This is treachery," she murmured, trying to repulse him. "Rise, sir, and leave me—leave me at once!" But Paul had seized her hand, and was covering it with kisses, and Madame de Marcenac had not strength to long resist the tears of the man she loved. "You distrusted me," she said, with an evident effort. "Now read the last farewell of little Bertha's mother!"

Paul dared not refuse to read this letter, which contained conclusive proofs of Madame de Marcenac's innocence; but it was not necessary for him to peruse it to be convinced that little Bertha was indeed Madame Larmor's daughter. He had not felt the slightest doubt of that fact since the evening before, and he would have given his life to atone for his injustice. "Will you ever forgive me?" he asked, pleadingly.

"I will try to forget how deeply you have wronged me. Endeavour to atone for it."

"I will devote my life to the task," exclaimed Paul, pressing another impassioned kiss upon Madame de Marcenac's hand.

The colonel's mind was at rest at last. "Till to-morrow, Paul; adieu, madame!" he said, with deep emotion.

"No; till we meet again!" replied Bertha, offering him her hand.

The colonel did not venture to imprint a kiss upon it; he was not in the habit of indulging in such acts of gallantry, but he executed a sort of military salute, and left the room after bestowing a smile on Martha Morgan and a friendly nod on Chardin.

\* \* \* \* \*

Six months have elapsed. A blissful, unbroken calm has succeeded days of anxiety and suspense. Sunshine has come after the storm. Paul de Lizy has married Bertha de Marcenac, and they have just left for Italy, where they will spend the winter. Their wedding was a very quiet affair, though they waited until the murder at Fontainebleau and the duel in the Rue des Lions Saint Paul were cleared up before they publicly plighted their troth.

Both affairs created more of a sensation than Sigoulès had expected. A duel within four walls is an uncommon occurrence; and the viscount's notoriety among a certain set was such that his tragic death could not pass unnoticed. At the club to which he belonged, nothing else was talked of for several weeks; but the members finally came to the unanimous conclusion that the pretended nobleman was a consummate scoundrel. Still, no one could prove that he had murdered Basfroi, for the police seemed to have nothing to say on the matter. The fact is, the authorities, who thoroughly understood the case, were anxious to avert any unnecessary scandal, so they remained silent.

Madame de Marcenac lost no time in announcing her determination not to benefit by Basfroi's will, and Chardin followed her example. Paul invested in the orphan's name the rest of the money he had won at Monaco; and although La Cadière deprived little Bertha of one hundred thousand francs, she will still have a very snug fortune when she comes of age. She mourned sincerely for her aunt, to whom she was deeply attached, but she mourned for her without suspecting that she was mourning for a mother. She will remain under the care of Martha Morgan. Sigoulès proposed to Madame de Marcenac that he should adopt the daughter of her unfortunate friend. The countess accepted his offer, and the little girl is known as Bertha Sigoulès. The colonel has been transferred from his command in Africa to a regiment stationed in Paris, and Paul declares, that in spite of his friends he will eventually marry Martha Morgan, who would make little Bertha the best of step-mothers. When Martha herself is slyly questioned on this delicate subject by her benefactress, she does not say no. Chardin has sold his house. Nothing in the world could induce him to live in it again; but he still thinks of it with regret, although he has taken up his abode in the immediate vicinity of Madame de Marcenac's residence. Roger de Bussière is the manager of a large estate which the countess has purchased some thirty miles from Paris. The Baron and Baroness de Lizy are as happy as heart could wish. All clouds have disappeared, and they remember the past only as one remembers a bad dream. But Paul does not yet know whether La Cadière was really the father of the colonel's adopted daughter or not. He has not ventured to ask his wife, and out of respect for Madame Larmor's memory, his wife will never tell him. That remains, and always will remain—BERTHA'S SECRET.

THE END.

# VIZETELLY'S ONE-VOLUME NOVELS.

*By English and Foreign Authors of Repute.*

"The idea of publishing one-volume novels is a good one, and we wish the series every success."—*Saturday Review*.

---

## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

By FEDOR DOSTOIEFFSKY.

Pronounced by the *Athenæum* to be "the most moving of all modern novels."

## THE TRIALS OF JETTA MALAUBRET (Noirs et Rouges).

By VICTOR CHERBULIEZ, of the French Academy.

Translated by the Countess GASTON DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

## ROLAND; or, The Expiation of a Sin.

By ARY ECILAW.

"A novel entitled 'Roland' is creating an immense sensation in Paris. The first, second, and third editions were swept away in as many days. The work is charmingly written."—*The World*.

---

## PRINCE ZILAH.

By JULES CLARETIE.

"M. Jules Claretie has of late taken a conspicuous place as a novelist."—*Times*.

---

## THE IRONMASTER; or, Love and Pride.

By GEORGES OHNET. From the 146th French Edition. Sixth Edition.

---

## A MUMMER'S WIFE.

By GEORGE MOORE. Author of "A Modern Lover." Sixth Edition.

---

## MR. BUTLER'S WARD.

By F. MABEL ROBINSON. Third Edition.

## NUMA ROUMESTAN; or, Joy Abroad and Grief at Home.

By ALPHONSE DAUDET. Third Edition.

---

## COUNTESS SARAH.

By GEORGES OHNET. Author of "The Ironmaster." From the 110th French Edition.

---

## THE CORSARS; or, Love and Lucre.

By JOHN HILL, Author of "The Waters of Marah." Second Edition.

---

## THE THREATENING EYE.

By E. F. KNIGHT. Author of "The Cruise of the Falcon."

---

## BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND DAWN.

By INA L. CASSILIS. Author of "Society's Queen."

---

## PRINCE SERGE PANINE.

By GEORGES OHNET. Author of "The Ironmaster." From the 110th French Edition.

---

## THE FORKED TONGUE.

By R. LANGSTAFF DE HAVILLAND, M.A. Author of "Enslaved."

---

## A MODERN LOVER.

By GEORGE MOORE. Author of "A Mummer's Wife." Second Edition.

*In double volumes, bound in scarlet cloth, price 2s. 6d. each.*

NEW EDITIONS OF THE  
GABORIAU AND DU BOISGOBEY  
SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

NOW READY

- 1.—THE MYSTERY OF ORCIVAL, AND THE GILDED CLIQUE.
- 2.—THE LEROUGE CASE, AND OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY.
- 3.—LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE.
- 4.—THE SLAVES OF PARIS.
- 5.—IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE, AND INTRIGUES OF A POISONER.
- 6.—DOSSIER NO. 113, AND THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATI-GNOLLES.
- 7.—THE COUNT'S MILLIONS.
- 8.—THE OLD AGE OF LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE.
- 9.—THE CATASTROPHE.
- 10.—THE DAY OF RECKONING.
- 11.—THE SEVERED HAND, AND IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.
- 12.—BERTHA'S SECRET, AND WHO DIED LAST?
- 13.—THE CRIME OF THE OPERA HOUSE.
- 14.—THE MATAPAN AFFAIR, AND A FIGHT FOR A FORTUNE.
- 15.—THE GOLDEN PIG, OR THE IDOL OF MODERN PARIS.
- 16.—THE THUMB STROKE, AND THE NAMELESS MAN.
- 17.—THE CORAL PIN.
- 18.—HIS GREAT REVENGE.

---

*In small post 8vo, ornamental covers, 1s. each ; in cloth, 1s. 6d.*

VIZETELLY'S POPULAR FRENCH NOVELS.

TRANSLATIONS OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF RECENT FRENCH  
FICTION OF AN UNOBJECTIONABLE CHARACTER.

---

*"They are books that may be safely left lying about where the ladies of the family can pick them up and read them. The interest they create is happily not of the vicious sort at all."*

SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT.

---

FROMONT THE YOUNGER & RISLER THE ELDER. By  
A. DAUDET.

"The series starts well with M. Alphonse Daudet's masterpiece."—*Athenæum*.

"A terrible story, powerful after a sledge-hammer fashion in some parts, and wonderfully tender, touching, and pathetic in others, the extraordinary popularity whereof may be inferred from the fact that this English version is said to be 'translated from the fiftieth French edition.'"—*Illustrated London News*.

SAMUEL BROHL AND PARTNER. By V CHERBULIEZ.

"Those who have read this singular story in the original need not be reminded of that supremely dramatic study of the man who lived two lives at once, even within himself. The reader's discovery of his double nature is one of the most cleverly managed of surprises, and Samuel Brohl's final dissolution of partnership with himself is a remarkable stroke of almost pathetic comedy."—*The Graphic*.

THE DRAMA OF THE RUE DE LA PAIX. By A. BELOT.

"A highly ingenious plot is developed in 'The Drama of the Rue de la Paix,' in which a decidedly interesting and thrilling narrative is told with great force and passion, relieved by sprightliness and tenderness."—*Illustrated London News*.

MAUGARS JUNIOR. By A. THEURIET.

## WAYWARD DOSIA, & THE GENEROUS DIPLOMATIST.

By HENRY GRÉVILLE.

"As epigrammatic as anything Lord Beaconsfield has ever written."—*Hampshire Telegraph*.

## A NEW LEASE OF LIFE, & SAVING A DAUGHTER'S DOWRY. By E. ABOUT.

"'A New Lease of Life' is an absorbing story, the interest of which is kept up to the very end."—*Dublin Evening Mail*.

"The story, as a flight of brilliant and eccentric imagination, is unequalled in its peculiar way."—*The Graphic*.

## COLOMBA, & CARMEN. By P. MÉRIMÉE.

"The freshness and raciness of 'Colomba' is quite cheering after the stereotyped three-volume novels with which our circulating libraries are crammed."—*Halifax Times*.

"'Carmen' will be welcomed by the lovers of the sprightly and tuneful opera the heroine of which Minnie Hauk made so popular. It is a bright and vivacious story."—*Life*.

## A WOMAN'S DIARY, & THE LITTLE COUNTESS. By O. FEUILLET.

"Is wrought out with masterly skill and affords reading, which although of a slightly sensational kind, cannot be said to be hurtful either mentally or morally."—*Dumbarton Herald*.

## BLUE-EYED META HOLDENIS, & A STROKE OF DIPLOMACY. By V. CHERBULIEZ.

"'Blue-eyed Meta Holdenis' is a delightful tale."—*Civil Service Gazette*.

"'A Stroke of Diplomacy' is a bright vivacious story pleasantly told."—*Hampshire Advertiser*.

## THE GODSON OF A MARQUIS. By A. THEURIET.

"The rustic personages, the rural scenery and life in the forest country of Argonne, are painted with the hand of a master. From the beginning to the close the interest of the story never flags."—*Life*.

## THE TOWER OF PERCEMONT & MARIANNE. By GEORGE SAND.

"George Sand has a great name, and the 'Tower of Perceмонт' is not unworthy of it."—*Illustrated London News*.

## THE LOW-BORN LOVER'S REVENGE. By V. CHERBULIEZ.

"'The Low-born Lover's Revenge' is one of M. Cherbuliez's many exquisitely written productions. The studies of human nature under various influences, especially in the cases of the unhappy heroine and her low-born lover, are wonderfully effective."—*Illustrated London News*.

## THE NOTARY'S NOSE, AND OTHER AMUSING STORIES.

By E. ABOUT.

"Crisp and bright, full of movement and interest."—*Brighton Herald*.

## DOCTOR CLAUDE; OR, LOVE RENDERED DESPERATE.

By H. MALOT. Two vols.

"We have to appeal to our very first flight of novelists to find anything so artistic in English romance as these books."—*Dublin Evening Mail*.

## THE THREE RED KNIGHTS; OR, THE BROTHERS' VENGEANCE. By P. FÉVAL.

"The one thing that strikes us in these stories is the marvellous dramatic skill of the writers."—*Sheffield Independent*.



